W.B. YEATS, T.S. ELIOT, AND THE ASSOCIATIONIST AESTHETIC

by

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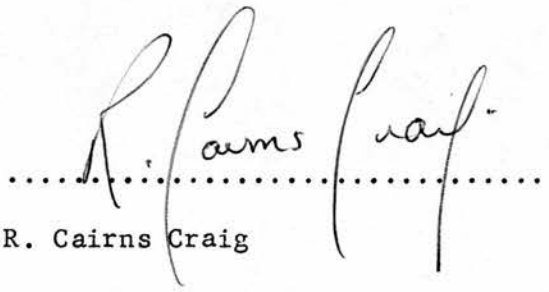
DECLARATION

I certify that this thesis has been composed by myself, that it has not been accepted in any previous application for a degree, that the work of which it is a record has been done by myself, and that all quotations have been distinguished by quotation marks and the sources of my information specifically acknowledged by means of footnotes.



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SUMMARY

Poems are not only shaped by the necessities of the words on the page, but in response to the linguistic and aesthetic conceptions of how and to what end communication between poet and reader occurs. Such theories are not external to the nature of the poem, but integral to its very formation. The theory within which Yeats and Eliot both worked was the associationist one deriving from Locke and Hume. It is often argued that associationism dies with Coleridge's criticism of Hartley, but it does so only in relation to the creator, not the reader, and poems go on being shaped thereafter by the poet's expectations of the reader's associative response. Associationism as an explanatory theory of the reader's experience reached its peak in the work of Archibald Alison, but in Yeats (who derived it from Shelley and Hallam) and Eliot (who learned it from Remy de Gourmont and, in a modified form named redintegration from Bradley) it becomes an active part of the artist's sense of his own construction of poems, since their poetry strives to use the reader's associations as a component part of the work itself.

The essential postulate of the associationist theory is that the reader's experience of art is always indirect, occurring through the train of associated images and feelings which the work generates out of the reader's own stock of memories. The greater the quantity of associations the work is capable of producing the greater its aesthetic value. Yeats's search for the primal images in the Great Memory and Eliot's use of allusion to previous art both represent techniques for increasing the associative potential of their poetry.

At the same time, no image or allusion, however powerful in itself, can be effective unless it is experienced in a mind stocked with sufficient memories to generate a continuous train of associations: the central problem of Yeats's and Eliot's criticism is how to ensure that the poem is fully experienced

when the reading experience remains entirely beyond any control the poet can exert through his poetry itself. In his prose writings Yeats constantly strives to link his poetry with a social group whose memories will be the appropriate associations for the full experience of his own art: the peasant nationalism, the occult society, the Anglo-Irish aristocracy and the community of spirits of A Vision each represent stages in his attempt to fix the nature of the memories for which his poems will be written and within which they will generate their fullest associative potential. Eliot's 'objective correlative' is similarly an attempt to directly link the poet's associations with the reader's, a link which can never be fully justified. The complete lack of any justifiable link between poet and reader within the associationist scheme is only resolved by Yeats in the invention of his system, and by Eliot in the acceptance of the delimiting context of Christian symbolism.

The poetry of both reveals the influence of the demands of their aesthetic. Its content is dominated by their sense of the inadequacy of memory in the modern world and the need to discover memories of a suprapersonal significance which will allow the poet and the reader to connect with each other beyond the boundaries of their own contingent memories. Yeats's poetry fall into four distinct phases related to his belief in memory's effectiveness: an early stage in which he tries to construct symbols from occult or Irish sources which will transcend ordinary memory by providing direct access to the eternal; a period from 1902 to 1912 or 1914 in which the poet has been completely divorced from transcendence by the lack of memory in the modern world. From 1912 onwards, under the stimulus of writing his autobiography, Yeats gradually recovers faith in memory, a faith that is fulfilled by the transcendent memories of the spirit world of Per Amica Silentia Lunae, revealing the other world to have the same structure as the associational process of art.

The symbol ceases to be antagonistic to ordinary experience but becomes complicit with, depending on time to provide the associations by which it becomes meaningful. In the final stage of his career the world's failure to meet the potentialities of his art leads Yeats to forego his associationist technique for a poetry of statement.

Eliot's poetry undergoes a parallel development; moving from monologues in which the consciousness of the characters, presented through his associative processes, is identical with the technique of the poetry in which he is embodied, to the achievement in 'The Waste Land' of a poem whose structure and meaning depend entirely on the associative responses of the reader. 'The Waste Land' is not a communication, has no protagonist: it is an act directed at the uncovering of communal layers of memory in the reader, reuniting him with the poet.

The associationist aesthetic is necessarily past directed: all meaning lies in memory. A continuity in time and in history is essential if the associative process is to be quantitatively effective, because only by the storing up in a community's memory over a long period of many images can powerful art be produced. The apparent failure of the connection between poet and reader is taken as a failure of the continuity of history: dissociation of sensibility is the loss of powerful associative potential. Both Yeats and Eliot attempt to reinstate continuity and to control the associative potentialities of their art by extra poetic means: reactionary politics are a means of closing the openness of their own associational creations.

The lost sense of continuity which associationist aesthetic theory necessarily invokes also means, however, that only poets from the peripheries of the English cultural sphere can fully achieve its potentialities: for them the divorce between poet and reader in associationist theory is already

realised in their actual relations with their audience. The history of poetry in Britain in this century is the history of the opposition between associational and non-associational modes, the former utilised most successfully by those from the cultural peripheries, the latter by those from the cultural core.

INTRODUCTION

When I first read the poetry of Yeats and Eliot, some thirteen or fourteen years ago, it was in The Faber Book of Modern Verse and for the first time I felt that poetry had spoken directly to me, as a part of the world in which I lived. The style, the images, the rhythms of 'Easter 1916', 'The Tower', 'Prelude' or 'The Waste Land' seemed almost like the language of my own experience of the world, an immediate self-recognition of a completely different kind from any experience of poetry I had read at school. There we had dipped into Keats and Wordsworth and a little Shakespeare among bouts of militaristic Tennyson and poetry itself had come to seem a part of the alien environment of education. At home the only poetry I knew was that of Burns, which did not count as poetry, but as a statement of cultural identity. It was, however, the cultural identity of the past.

I was living at that time in central Scotland, in an area where the depradations of the industrial revolution were so total as to form a self-enclosed environment with its own scale of beauty and ugliness. The coal bings slid from all around the town towards the council houses, the shale bings glowed like burning mountains in the evening light all around. When you climbed up the hill out of the town the haze of industrial smoke formed its own kind of romantic mist over the landscape and touched everything with an insubstantial fragility and beauty. It was the same dignity that you found on the faces of old men sitting on benches among a few token trees planted in tarmac beside the public conveniences in the centre of the town, or in the faces of the women crushed into buses on grey rain-swept Saturday afternoons. Yeats and Eliot might not talk about that landscape, but I felt their language was the language of those experiences

and, though no one might know it, had given a voice to the people I lived among. I felt their sufferings had been noted and understood, had been made permanent in the experience of the world.

That first impression could not last. After all, these poets had not spoken from among the people I knew and I could hardly expect them to speak for them. But as I discovered the layers of disgust and contempt in the poetry, and later in the political writings, of the poets whose poetry I could not help but feel as a part of myself, contempt and disgust directed much of the time towards the people I had grown up among, the people of my own family, people whose lives had been cramped and despoiled by an exploitatory industrial system, I knew that I had touched on some contradictory crux of my own personality, or of their poetry. That they could write poems which embodied that world and yet could not tolerate the people who suffered in that world, that their social and political views should be so intensely opposite to my own while the poetry remained so close to my own experiences, was the contradiction out of which this thesis has been written. I have been reading their works now for more than half my life: the poetry speaks no less, though perhaps differently, to me now than it did then, but I hope I now understand, at least in part, the dynamics of that contradiction and its implications both for their poetry and for myself.

Much of what follows may show no imprint of the experiences which I have just outlined, but it is under the pressure of that contradiction that the purely intellectual content of this work has been produced. It is an attempt to understand how poetry could speak so directly to me when I was one of those whom the poets regarded as the vulgar masses, when my

commitment was to the future power of those masses over their own destiny, when I was revolted by the wealth, the security, the culture which these poets asserted to be the most valuable part of the social organism and necessary to the production of art. At first I conceived my task as one of explaining, perhaps explaining away, the political and social views espoused by Yeats and Eliot in the 'twenties and 'thirties; subsequently I thought of my task as sociologically explaining the nature of their art so that one could understand how it came to have the shape it did and why it was marked by the social implications of its origins. Those tasks have come to be subsumed under a different one because I found that the connections between literature and political and social experience could only be dealt with indirectly. In the search for a methodology I worked my way through Lukacs and Raymond Williams, Lucien Goldmann and Roland Barthes and, though my work no doubt cannot conceal their influence, I found nothing that would suit my purpose. In simple terms the reason was that none of them had dealt successfully with poetry: it is easy to establish certain kinds of connection between the literary artifact and social experience when the literary artifact contains something that can pass as a picture of social experience, but such a connection is much more difficult - some might say impossible - to establish when the work, as even in the case of 'The Waste Land', does not set out to place its action directly in the social world. Poetry, even when it uses elements of our social existence is not, at least in the case of what we accept as 'modernist' poetry, directed towards our social

experience in the way that a novel or a play is.[1] Even the most psychological of novels will provide a more complete schema of social experience than the most political of poems, because it requires so much more contextualisation in order to fulfil itself in the reader's mind. Kafka's novels give us more information about their social environment than Auden's or MacNeice's poems because the novel, as a medium, demands that its characters are supplied with a world full of things, of objects and relations beyond the self.[2]

At the same time, the very nature of the contradiction which was my motive for working on these two poets prevents me from accepting that art can be divorced from the social world, that any piece of art can

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1 The divorce between poetry and the novel, which seems to have become fixed in our critical thinking and which I am accepting here for the purposes of argument, was not as complete in the nineteenth century as in the early twentieth. Wordsworth's The Prelude probably provides social information in much the same way as Jane Austen's novels. However, if John Speirs's argument in Poem Towards Novel (London: Faber, 1971) is valid, the reason for the divorce may be that we are reading novels in the wrong way. Speirs argues that the interiorisation of consciousness in Romantic poetry profoundly affected the structure of the nineteenth century novel, and perhaps, therefore, we have to consider the poetic structure of the novel as the important carrier of social meaning, rather than its explicit social content. An interesting case in point is Raymond Williams's The Country and the City (St Albans: Paldin, 1975), for Williams uses poetry in establishing his argument, but uses it purely in terms of its content, ignoring the fact that it is poetry, whereas in discussing Dickens (ch. 15) it is the form of the novels which he emphasises, and not their content. The realisation that one cannot make direct connections between art work and social environment has changed Williams's approach in this particular case, but it is one which stands out in his book exactly because of its difference from his other critiques.

2 Cf. Michel Zeraffa, Fictions: The Novel and Social Reality, trans. Catherine Burns and Tom Burns (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1976), p. 10: 'The novel is directly concerned with the nature of our situation in history, and with the direction in which that situation is about to move. Most great novelists are theorists of their art because their work poses the most insoluble of all problems of interpretation: what meaning, and therefore what form, should we give to the unceasing flow of human life? And the reason that the questions "What is the novel?" and "Where is the novel heading?" have arisen again and again over the last century is that the creation of a work of fiction seems - I repeat seems - to imply a meaningful connection between causality and destiny...'

escape being replete with social significance. Sartre has argued that we can except poetry from our normal sense of literature's connections with its environment exactly because poetry, as a mode, turns away from the world, and even from language itself:

> ... pour le poète, le langage est une structure du monde extérieur. Le parleur est en situation dans le langage, investi par les mots; ce sont les prolongements de ses sense, ses pinces, ses antennes, ses lunettes; il les manoeuvre du dedans, il les sent comme son corps, il est entouré d'un corps verbal ... Le poète est hors du langage, il voit les mots à l'envers, comme s'il n'appartenait pas à la condition humaine et que, venant vers les hommes, il rencontrât d'abord la parole comme une barrière. [1]

There seems, however, to be a basic inconsistency in our treating poetry as though it were entirely separate from all other forms of literary creation and from other modes of cultural production. Particularly since the tradition of poetry in English has never moved so completely away from engagement with the ordinary world as the tradition has, at certain times, in French: 'Easter 1916' is not a poem that turns its back on the social world, even if its attitude to it remains problematic. Sartre's exclusion of poetry is more, I think, of a personal and cultural blindness than a real distinction.

A much more powerful case has been offered, however, to the effect that poetry, as Sartre describes it, is in fact the appropriate model for all the literary arts. This separation of literature from the rest of our life can, to a large extent, be traced to the influence of Eliot's early criticism and yet, paradoxically, Eliot is one of the major writers of the past half-century whose connections with reactionary politics have provided the focus for our discussion of literature's social implications.

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1 Jean-Paul Sartre, Qu'est ce que la littérature (Paris: Gallimard/NRF, 1967) p. 18.

The same paradox is evident in Yeats, whose constant temptation towards a world of poetic purity was balanced by a desire to transform the world by specific political action. The tension between the independent values of poetry and its social context and social involvement that is evident in Yeats and Eliot disappears in some of this critical writing, and the first thing that happens when we attempt to treat poetry as unconnected with our ordinary historical world, I suggest, is that we try to neutralise the involvement of the poet with his time and of the man with his poem. We create a schizophrenic poet-man who ceases to be responsible to or for what is going on around him in exactly the role in which he is most significant, that of poet. The process is perfectly illustrated by W.H. Auden's defence of Yeats, after his death in 1939, in a mock trial called 'The Public v. the late Mr. William Butler Yeats':

> ... art is a product of history, not a cause. Unlike some other products, technical inventions for example, it does not re-enter history as an effective agent, so that the question whether art should or should not be propaganda is unreal. The case for the prosecution rests on the fallacious belief that art ever makes anything happen, whereas the honest truth, gentlemen, is that, if not a picture had been painted, not a poem written, nor a bar of music composed, the history of man would be materially unchanged.[1]

By removing the work of art from the causal sequence of history Auden anaesthetises it against the actual beliefs of its creator, allowing us to approach it as a purely formal construction. We admit the creator's faults or his biases or the areas in which we disagree with him, but we refuse to see his work sullied by his own nature. Given, however, that he is writing in 1939, with his own period of political poetry immediately behind him, Auden cannot resist reintroducing political terminology into

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1 W.H. Auden, 'The Public v. the late Mr. William Butler Yeats'; Partisan Review, Vol. 6, No. 3 (Spring, 1939). Reprinted in William H. Pritchard (ed.) W.B. Yeats: A Critical Anthology (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1972) p. 142.

the now purely aesthetic realm of the poetic construction:

> However false or undemocratic his ideas, his diction shows a continuous evolution towards what one might call the true democratic style. The social virtues of a real democracy are brotherhood and intelligence, and the parallel linguistic virtues are strength and clarity, virtues which appear ever more clearly through successive volumes by the deceased.[1]

Whether 'brotherhood and intelligence' are the virtues of democracy, real or otherwise, and whether 'strength and clarity' have always been linked with those virtues we may leave to one side; what has happened is that having got rid of the event which actually participated in the historical world - the poet - Auden is now able to assimilate the work to an emotionally satisfying political terminology. The work is acceptable because it is parallel to our political virtues, though naturally it cannot influence them. The historical Yeats, and indeed the historical work, is annihilated in favour of a pattern of parallelisms which will make us continue to accept the poetry of a man whose beliefs we cannot tolerate: 'The diction of The Winding Stair is the diction of a just man, and it is for this reason that just men will always recognize the author as a master.'[2]

Such an annihilation of the author in favour of something we then call 'the work' has been implicit in much of the best criticism of our times. Eliot's impersonal theory of poetry was only the opening call in a much longer battle, one in which, again, Eliot has played a double role as his later poetry came to be attacked and defended for the religious beliefs that could only be discussed in terms of the poet and the poetry. As in the case of Auden's essay on Yeats, much of the criticism practised

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1 Ibid.

2 Ibid., p. 142.

under the banner of the autotelic work of art smuggles in extra-aesthetic criteria in its definition of art. The process is best demonstrated by the now famous - or notorious - theory of the 'intentional fallacy', which makes it an epistemological function of the nature of art that the work can have no direct relation to its author as a human being with a specified history, but can only be related to him as a 'poet' within a cultural environment. Wimsatt, for instance, insists on an ultimate distinction between criticism and author psychology, and presents as relevant to the critic only the following context: 'the semantics and syntax of the poem, through our habitual knowledge of the language, through grammars, dictionaries and all the literature which is the source of dictionaries, in general through all that makes a language and a culture.'[1] What Wimsatt is talking about is not 'what makes a language and a culture' in a causal sense, though his language might deceive the reader and perhaps himself into thinking he is, but about what we have now, in the present, that we can call the culture of our past. Literature is the source of dictionaries only in the sense we go to literature for the preservation of language from the past: the real source of dictionaries in a causal sense is the speech of people in particular historical circumstances, speech which is modified through the literary arts and preserved by them. To undertake a work of criticism we have to go far beyond language, we have to go to what the language is about and we cannot know what any linguistic structure is about through looking in dictionaries, since dictionaries are themselves linguistic structures. What language is about is the experience of human beings and, though, all human experience

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1 W.K. Wimsatt, The Verbal Icon: Studies in the Meaning of Poetry (London: Methuen, 1970), p. 10.

is modified by and mediated through language, we cannot hypostatise the experience itself into a linguistic experience.

Of course, Wimsatt and his fellow critics in no way imagine that this is what they are doing, nor are they: the crucial term is 'culture', which is presented as a linguistic background to the poetic artifact but which conceals a historical motive and a normative scheme. If the poem does not enter into history are we mere aesthetes in our appreciation of it? The answer is no, because the poem is a structure of tensions revealing the basic dilemmas of our human condition, or of our personal psychological situation, or of the culture. M.L. Rosenthal, for instance, provides us with the following analysis of the role of Yeats's poetry in relation to our own time:

> At any time, but especially in a critical and analytical one, the whole poem, considered as a cultural symbol embodying basic identifications, documents its culture by testing its attitudes. It subjects "approved" social attitudes to a simultaneous testing against observed social reality and against the poet's inner sense of truth and balance. This balance is decisive finally, for it encompasses the poet's subjective awareness of tradition and of the intellectual landscape of his day as well as his literal feelings and moral bent. If the aesthetic structure has integrity, the implied cultural evaluations will also.[1]

The final sentence performs the same sleight of hand as Auden's defence: we work backwards from the literary value - conceived statically as aesthetic structure - to the value of the judgments being made. The judgments themselves are then neutralised by being seen in the perspective of 'culture' and 'tradition', which we all know to be things above the muck of ordinary everyday history. The poet judges our 'approved social attitudes' in terms of perspectives which go beyond the present and do not,

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1 M.L. Rosenthal, 'On Yeats and the Cultural Symbolism of Modern Poetry', Yale Review, XLIX (1960), p. 582.

naturally, represent social attitudes of any kind themselves. The poet's inner sense of 'truth and balance' is a function of these higher areas of awareness and so is not called into question in terms of the actualities of the contemporary situation. Rosenthal skates round the whole question of the implications of a poetic ideology by constructing a series of self reflecting terms: the poem opposes its time by testing its attitudes, what it uses, however, is not anything belonging to its time but the perspective of tradition and culture. We need not, therefore, worry too much over the views of poetry because ultimately they are, no matter what they might say they are doing, only 'testing' out our attitudes, and we are all the better for that. Poetry is a place where we test our attitudes before we return to life and since it is a test based on culture and tradition, which are good, nothing bad can ever escape from it into life, especially since good poetry and good morals always go together. Not, that is, in the poet himself, but in his sense of balance, which is tradition, which preserves and does not change, which means we can all eat a hearty meal because we are all safe again. By making the poem document culture and by making culture mostly a matter of poetry we create an enclosed self-reflective world of artistic concerns: 'a mouth / A way of speaking.'[1]

Here I reach a point which I can argue but which, in the end, is not resolvable within the context of literary debate. We are at the point of an ultimate disagreement about the nature of human experience, the point at which art itself, or philosophy, or politics, must take over from literary criticism and the theory of criticism. I cannot accept such a view because

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1 W.H. Auden, 'In Memory of W.B. Yeats', Collected Shorter Poems, 1927-1957 (London: Faber, 1969), p. 141.

it seems to me its implicit purposes are opposed to my own; not purposes in criticism, but purposes in life. The 'tradition' by which these tests of our values are carried out is not one that I can accept, and my experience of the poems themselves is not of such a test, but of a confrontation with a set of values which challenge and demand answers from my own. The confrontation is made possible by the aesthetic embodiment of those values but that aesthetic embodiment does not justify the values embodied. It is not a matter of 'accepted social attitudes' versus the real truths of 'tradition', but of one set of human experiences confronting another. The implicit purposes of 'tradition' and 'culture' are interestingly revealed in Wimsatt's work. The verbal icon comes to be not just a set of verbal tensions, but of verbal tensions which are the indices of moral tensions (moral terms, of course, appear in dictionaries and so can appear in poems as well):

> Poetry, by its concreteness and dramatic presentation of value situations, whether it inclines to a right answer or to a wrong answer - by the very fullness and hence imaginative power of its presentation - has the meaning and being which makes it poetry. This is the poetic value. It is a rhetorical value only inasmuch as the nuances of rhetoric, the symbolic complexities of a rhetorical unity, are the counterparts of the psychological complexities which make the meaning of the poem.[1]

If we talk about complexities of language we are really talking about complex moral problems; to be aware of the complexities of language of course demands a certain kind of 'culture' and 'tradition'; to achieve a complex presentation of the value situations which is the 'meaning and being' of poetry one has to assent to a particular kind of 'culture'. The poem ceases to be an event in the poet's biography and becomes an event in a certain kind of cultural history and cannot, indeed, be an event of any

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1 Wimsatt, Verbal Icon, p. 98.

significance unless it takes its place in that cultural history:

> The Christian critic, if he cares to insist to the full at all moments on his Christianity as well as on his critical discernment, may without doing violence to the latter follow the direction recently pointed out to the poet: "Christian dogma will aid the artist not by giving him a priveleged and special subject-matter but rather by defining for him a perspective from which 'full light' can be had on all subject matters" ... The greatest poetry will be morally right, even though perhaps obscurely so, in groping confusions of will and knowledge ...[1]

The Christian tradition defines what will count as the appropriate perspective within which to see the nature of the moral problems we face and the choices we have to make, but that tradition will not reveal itself directly, it will reveal itself in the fullness of light in which the author presents his subject matter. No matter what an author may say for himself, his poem is in fact an event of this kind.

An application of exactly this kind of criticism can be found in Cleanth Brooks's The Hidden God. Discussing Virginia Moore's critical work on Yeats, The Unicorn, Brooks writes:

> Miss Moore strives valiantly to prove Yeats was a Christian after all. She has to admit finally that he was heterodox, though "not perniciously so" and therefore "not heretical" ... What we can say, with confidence, is that Yeats found his imagination gripped by the great Christian symbols ... and his mind constantly engaged by the historical and doctrinal problems of Christianity, and that through a lifetime he struggled against the thin and vapid oversimplifications of pseudoscience and popular scientism.[2]

Yeats may not be a Christian poet, but his poetry is Christian in its tradition and remains as an important body of work because of its place in that tradition. The individual lineaments of the author's achievements are discussable only in terms of a preconceived notion of what constitutes

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1 Ibid., p. 100.

2 Cleanth Brooks, The Hidden God (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1963), p. 60.

the tradition by which aesthetic - and human - value is determined. It is not the tradition of the poet's own choice but the tradition of the critic, and the work is assimilated to the values of the criticism in order that it can be a valuable work. The influence of Eliot here is crucial and, as in Eliot's thought, what appears to be an aesthetic criterion of value is in the end justified by non-aesthetic norms, by values which belong, as Eliot recognised they had to, to the ultimate foundations of our beliefs. The annihilation of the significance of the author has, however, continued to dominate our critical perspectives in the sense that we see the author as an ideal construction of the influences upon him, as a carrier of 'tradition', rather than as someone responding to previous writing in order to come to terms with his contemporary experience. It is a process which has been much more remarked of marxist critics than of those influenced by the school of the New Criticism. Among the marxist writers a passage such as this one from Lukacs's essay on Kafka might stand as typical:

> ... the experience of the contemporary capitalist world does produce, especially among intellectuals, angst, nausea, a sense of isolation, and despair ... The diabolical character of the world of modern capitalism, and man's impotence in the face of it, is the real subject matter of Kafka's writings ... Angst, haunting and indefinable, is perfectly reflected in this vague, ahistorical, timeless world, steeped in the atmosphere of Prague.[1]

The values which provide 'full light' on every subject are different, but the decision that the 'real subject matter' is of a kind that, even if only tangentially, relates to the central values of the critic is parallel to Brooks's assimilation of Yeats to a deep concern with Christian dogmatics.

What we have in each of these cases is the annexation of the poet to

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1 Georg Lukacs, The Meaning of Contemporary Realism (London: Merlin Press, 1962). My quotation is a selective one from pp. 76 and 77-78, but it is not, I think, unfair to the nature of Lukacs's argument.

the subjectivity of the critic as that subjectivity poses as part of the only objective - i.e. true - interpretation of the universe. Works of art are measured as successes or failures in their ability to reveal the truths already known by the critics, although perhaps not fully recognised by the artists. The separation of their aesthetic qualities from the social world, equally with their assimilation to the social world, is an act that annihilates the complexity of the work's relations with the history around it, an act most easily achieved by removing the significance of the author who actually moved through that history. By so doing, of course, we have removed ourselves from the history in which we live, assimilating its complexity, the openness of its future, to a closed system of value established by a selective reading of the past. We remove the possibility of our own failure by making the world correspond already to the nature of the values we hope to implement. In each case what we are dealing with is a world reduced to a set of terms assumed not to be hermeneutic devices but to be reality itself: the work of art is flattened out into a reflection of 'tradition' or into a reflection of the evolving processes of the economic base. Sartre faces up to the marxist form of this process in Search for a Method:

> When Marx writes: 'The materialist conception of the world signifies simply the conception of nature as it is without any foreign addition,' he makes himself into an objective observation and claims to contemplate nature as it is absolutely. Having stripped away all subjectivity and having assimilated himself into pure objective truth, he walks in a world of objects inhabited by object men.[1]

The object men of tradition are no less objects by being cultural or religious, for they too have ceased to exist in favour of simplifying schemes of absolute values. Both sets of critics annihilate subjectivity

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1 Jean-Paul Sartre, Search for a Method, trans. Hazel E. Barnes (New York: Vintage Books, 1953), p. 32.

in an attempt to achieve an objectively valid set of relations. This is by no means to say, of course, that these views have not been usefully employed in helping us understand works of art and certain areas of our response to them: it is merely to say that they were themselves efforts to establish certain sets of values as absolute and that their time is past. Hopefully, our own time will be a time that recognises the dangers of the absolute and will therefore be able to accept what neither of these views can justify, that a work can be heretical and great, that it can challenge the values of the critic and not thereby be meaningless, or immature, or decadent.

A full awareness of the nature of art demands, I want to posit, as at least one of its poles of force, an awareness of the historical context of its creation, of the fact that human beings do not live in a world of culture, of tradition but of culture and tradition as mediated by economic forces. The culture and tradition elevated to such significance by the post-Eliot school of critics has nothing to do with the culture and tradition of the people in factories, in mines, in shops, among whom I grew up and whose experience I for one think to be of some importance in the development of the western world. To talk of 'culture' and 'tradition' as though those were not maintained by economic forces which deprive others of the conditions for culture and tradition, or as though there were only one culture, one tradition, is an evasion of the world in which the poems are created and a slight on their significance to our human condition just as much as the assimilation of human creativity to a reflex of economic forces. The work of art, because it lasts, is not above history any more than the dialectic is <u>in</u> history: the work of art escapes from its own point in history by being in our awareness, which is in history, and the

and the dialectic is in history insofar as it is our awareness of our construction of history from our own historical situatedness. It is this multiple set of relationships of which we must remain aware, the move outwards towards what we can describe as 'objective' knowledge and the move inwards into our own subjective condition. As Jean Duvignaud puts it in The Sociology of Art:

> Those actually living in society cannot be aware of the real functions exercised by the activities of that society. Ideologies clarify, to a certain extent, those functions, but this is to anticipate the explanation which only history can give at a later date. Fortunately for us, creativity in a living society does not completely explain itself to us. To be left in doubt is part of our freedom.[1]

What Duvignaud does not point out is that sociological analysis, historical explanation, literary criticism are parts of our creativity. For Descartes, to doubt everything was the first step towards ultimate certainty; for us, to eschew certainty of anything is the first step towards creative doubt. Without certainty the relationships between the various terms in the literary equation become more multifarious and we cannot leap from one thing, the work, to another, tradition or society, so rapidly. We must explore the lines of connection at various levels before we can suggest an explanation and we must never lose sight of the subject who does the exploring. I hope that at least some of the situatedness of this subject has now become clear.

Having come full circle, then, from my own concern with Yeats and Eliot to a theoretical statement of the importance of that personal involvement, I want to return to the lack of attention to the poem as a social experience, as a carrier of social as well as personal meanings.

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1 Jean Duvignaud, The Sociology of Art, trans. Timothy Wilson (London: Paladin, 1972), p. 141.

The failure to find an appropriate mode of connecting the poem with its historical situation except in terms of cultural influence and the zeitgeist, both of which are themselves in need of explanation, results, I want to suggest, from a reification of the poem that follows on the annihilation of the significance of the author. The poem is reified by being made to hold to a particular shape, a rigid definition of its possible patterns as though it had ceased to exist as the intermediary of a communicative procedure between two human beings. To treat the poem as the words on the page, or as the reflex of economic circumstances, is to solidify what is essentially process, to make into an object what can only be a movement between minds. Again I would like to quote Sartre, who suggests in relation to Flaubert that 'the objective meaning of the book ... is the result of a compromise between what this new generation of readers claims in terms of its own history and what the author can offer to it from his own.'[1] The 'new generation of readers' are the readers at the time of the novel's first publication and, therefore, even in the historical location of the work's first appearance we can see it as part of a process of meaning, not as a given set of meanings. Walter J. Ong has analysed the opposite pole of the same process in the writer's awareness of a fictional audience embodied in his style, and has suggested that works of literature draw the reader into a particular kind of role in relation to the author in order to establish the communicative process on a certain footing.[2] Once we accept the fact of communicative process as a part of the poem's form it changes the nature of the poem we are reading: the poem no longer exists as a thing on the page, it exists as a certain kind of recreation in the reader's mind, a recreation which

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1 Jean-Paul Sartre, Search for a Method, p. 64.

2 Walter J. Ong, 'The Writer's Audience is always a Fiction', PMLA 90 (1975), I, pp. 9-21.

happens in terms of certain conceptions, which may be advertised within the work, of how communication is achieved. The poem as it is read is read within a set of assumed communicative stances which determine the shape of the poem experienced. These stances can be incorporated into the matrix of the poem by the poet, but he cannot define the context into which the poem will enter in its reception: every reading of a poem is a meeting point of such communicative stances, an attempt to achieve common ground between contradictory communicative categories.

We have been accustomed since Coleridge's criticism to see the work of art as having its own specific form, an organic relationship between its form and its content. As I will discuss later in more detail, it seems to me that Coleridge's insight is dependent on excising from the nature of the work its reading, its experience by the recipient, and on emphasising the experience of its creator. If we reintroduce the role of the recipient of the poem we have to see poetic form as something meaningful over and above its organic relation with its content: poetic form is itself a process of meaning established within specific modes of communicative procedure. These set the boundaries of the kinds of meaning which can be transmitted and are, perhaps, in the end, the most important meaning that is being transmitted. It is perhaps this sense of procedures of meaning, rather than the meaningful content, which most affects us as readers of poetry (and perhaps of all literature), because it is the embodiment of the perspective within which the world of our ordinary experience becomes significant, and in becoming significant, becomes a challenge or a buttress to our own purposes in what we take to be the

real world.[1]

It is in this area of the procedures of communication and the meaning of form that the most important mediations between our social world and our aesthetic world take place, I want to suggest. It is through these procedures that aesthetic experience comes to be separate from other forms of experience and so potentially autotelic; but, at the same time, these procedures are essential to the very possibility of communication and so form a categorical matrix that links aesthetic experience back into our ordinary world and our specific purposes in that world. The categorial matrix of the aesthetic realm is probably - without the specific studies, of which I hope the rest of this thesis is one, one cannot go further than the statement of a hypothesis of this kind - deeply connected, perhaps homologous with, the categorial matrix of our knowledge in general at any given point in history.[2] The content which a work carries may differ

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1 My discussion of these matters is necessarily restricted and is intended only to elucidate some of the elements which inform the rest of the work; the argument is in accord with, for instance, the work of Jean Piaget. See Genetic Epistemology (New York: Columbia University Press, 1970); the following is quoted from p. 15 of that work: '... human knowledge is essentially active. To know is to assimilate reality into systems of transformations. To know is to transform reality in order to understand how a certain state is brought about ... knowing an object does not mean copying it - it means acting upon it. It means constructing systems of transformations that can be carried out on or with this object.' What I call categories of meaning or procedures of meaning would constitute such systems of transformation, systems which can be studied apart from the content upon which they operate.

2 The possibility of such a connection between aesthetic structures and other structures of consciousness is the central element in the work of Lucien Goldmann; see particularly The Hidden God, trans. Philip Thody (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1964). It seems to me that despite his asserted epistemological position as a 'genetic structuralist' Goldmann suffers from a mechanical conception of the dialectic, an assumption that there is an ultimate knowledge to which we can aspire; cf. Georges Gurvitch, The Social Frameworks of Knowledge, trans. M.A. Thompson and K.A. Thompson (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1971): '... the sociology of knowledge cannot serve to invalidate false knowledge, "demistify" it or "disalienate" it as Marx wanted it to do. First, it is not its function to decide on the veracity of the content of knowledge for it does not claim to take the place of epistemology; secondly, the disalienation of knowledge, understood as the freeing of all ties between knowledge and the social framework, even if it is projected as something possible only in the future, can represent for the sociologist only an intellectualist utopia of disincarnate knowledge.' (p. 12).

enormously between different writers in the same period, but the categories by which that content is formed may be the same or similar. We do not need to annex a writer to unilinear tradition or unilinear economic forces in order to reintegrate him into history, we need to study the ways in which the personal vision of the man is mediated in its transmission by the communication procedures that form the categorial matrix without which there could be no transmission of meaning at all. It is the categorial matrix that shapes the form of the work and relates the individual and his biography into the pattern of our common history.

As always, critical understanding follows upon the artist's own realisation of his procedures, not only his use of them but his awareness that he is using them. It seems to me that Yeats and Eliot were both deeply concerned with issues related to what I have called the categorial matrix. To some extent this was forced upon them by the breakdown in conventions brought about by the extension and specialisation of the reading public, the lost conventions being, as it were, the visible part of the iceberg of communicative categories. Partly, it was the result of the all round increase in self-consciousness in relation to human thought which was the outcome of post-Kantian philosophy. The discoveries of the social sciences, revealing in sociology and in psychology the apparently determined nature of our thinking processes, thrust the nature of those processes, their formative influence upon what it is we think, into the forefront of intellectual activity. Finally, perhaps, it was the application to poetry of the kind of thinking which had gone into the theory of the novel in the latter half of the nineteenth century. What had been in Flaubert, in Henry James, in Ford Madox Ford attempts to state the aesthetic rather than the utilitarian or entertainment value of the

novel as a form, made the novelist the most theoretically aware of the literary practitioners and raised the novel to the pre-eminent literary form. From being a rather poor relation of poetry, the novel became the central area of experiment and invention in the literary arts and to give poetry back its significance as a mode of writing the same kind of theoretical investigation had to be undertaken. It was Eliot's great tactical achievement to make poetry again the very centre of literary activity,[1] but the effective instruments of that achievement were not his critical discriminations by themselves, but his provision of, however fragmentarily, a psychology of the poetic process, embodied in the 'objective correlative' and the 'unified sensibility', which established the categorial preconditions of successful poetic communication. What Eliot was doing in those influential early essays, however, had already been done - more eccentrically, but arguably more successfully - by Yeats in the period of his great critical writings between 1898 and 1906. Yeats's terminology was not suited for easy acceptance into the world of academic critics, as Eliot's was, but he deals with the same issues in attempting to establish the psychological importance of poetry and its communicative basis.

It was in the course of reading those critical writings that I noticed the persistence of the idea of 'association'. I knew, of course, the importance of associationist theory in eighteenth century aesthetic theory

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1 Cf. Desmond Hawkins, 'The Pope of Russell Square', in Tambimuttu and Richard March (ed.), T.S. Eliot: A Symposium (London: Frank and Cass, 1965), pp. 45-46: 'Eliot restored the position of poetry as a high art and not merely a capricious effusion. The 'twenties had been dominated by the novelists. In the 'thirties the initiative passed to the poets - and the change was due more to Eliot than to anyone else. He rekindled the technical excitement of verse as a medium ... He was to poetry what Henry James had been to the novel.'

and particularly the importance of its psychological implications in the work of Hume, but that it should remain such a crucial item in the critical armoury until the twentieth century struck me at first as strange. What was even stranger was the regularity of its use by critics of Yeats and Eliot, a regularity matched only by the vagueness with which it was invoked. Or rather, the vagueness which the term implied was always invoked only to be negated by the idea of 'association' itself which the critic felt to have introduced an element of specificity. Let me give two examples. The first is from Richard Ellmann's The Identity of Yeats and deals with the symbols of the cross and the rose in Yeats's early poetry:[1]

> These emblems pervade much of Yeats's early verse. Forms so archetypal as the cross and the circle, which the petals of the rose form, have of course a great many implications, some of which we can fix. The four petals are then, chiefly, the four elements. The conjunction of the rose and cross which suggests the fifth element or quintessence is the central myth of Rosicrucianism, and Yeats was an active member of the Rosicrucian order of the Golden Dawn throughout the 'nineties. In the order, the conjunction is often referred to as the 'mystic marriage', as the transfiguring ecstasy which occurs when the adept, after the long pain and self-sacrifice of the quest in this world, a world in which opposites are forever quarrelling, finds his cross - the symbol of that struggle and opposition - suddenly blossom with the rose of love, harmony and beauty ... The conjunction can also be regarded as sexual symbolism, in which Yeats, as comparative mythologist and occultist was well versed; the masculine principle, the cross, merges with the feminine principle, the rose. The cross has the apparent connotation of Christ and Christianity, while the rose, although a Christian symbol too, sometimes implies, as in his dream, a kind of pagan beauty. These associations help to clarify one of the more cryptic of Yeats's early poems.

Apart from the fact that Ellmann uses 'emblem' and 'symbol', 'connotation' and 'association' as identical pairs of terms, the purpose of his invoking associations is to make definite what in the poem is vague. He offers the

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1 Richard Ellmann, The Identity of Yeats (London: Faber, 1964), pp. 65-66.

four elements, 'chiefly', as the equations of the four petals, but it is exactly the extent to which the symbol goes beyond that identification that makes it poetically interesting. Similarly, the listing of the possible meanings of cross and rose give the appearance of a limited number of variants which can be substituted for the symbols to produce the meaning of the poem: but it is exactly the applicability of all the variants simultaneously that makes the symbol more powerful than the direct statement of any of its associations. What is lacking in Ellmann's analysis is any real sense of the purpose of 'association' or of its psychological basis. He is treating, as indeed Yeats's use of them sometimes entitles him to do, the images as emblems having certain equivalences, not as centres of associative activity.

The same reduction of image to equivalence through the apparent use of the idea of association, this time consistently described as 'connotation', can be found in Gertrude Patterson's T.S. Eliot: poems in the making. In tracing Eliot's links with the symbolist tradition Ms. Patterson explains how Eliot avoided the problem of 'overconnotation', of suggesting too much and specifying too little:

> Eliot avoids the lack of structural coherence, inevitable when the conventional 'rational' structure is abandoned ... by 'fixing' his 'personal' symbols within the 'scaffold' of myth, traditional religion and against the background of all the literature known to him. His symbols of the hyacinth and the lilac in'The Waste Land' are well known in medieval myths and if we are acquainted with such myths we cannot miss what Eliot wishes to evoke by them. But if we are not familiar with the background, he offers us a further delimitation. 'The Burial of the Dead' is at once a denotative and connotative title. The Christian service of the burial of the dead has at its base the belief that 'the dead shall be raised incorruptible' and only out of death shall there be life. Spring flowers then are set against this background, suggesting the coming of life and fertility of spring after the deadness of winter. Here Eliot has succeeded in fixing the connotation 'so that there may be no missing the evocation.' [1]

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1 Gertrude Patterson, T.S. Eliot: poems in the making (Manchester: University Press, 1971), p. 51.

The trouble with this analysis is that it does not justify the limitations it asserts to be a part of the poem: why should we stop at medieval myths for the suggestion of hyacinths and lilacs? What instructs us as to the appropriate location of meaning referred to? Might we not look for and find entirely other possible connections and how would we discount them from our reading? And does the suggestion of growth and fertility after winter really suffice for more than a mere fraction of what is suggested by 'hyacinth' in the following lines from 'The Waste Land':

> 'You gave me hyacinths first a year ago;
> 'They called me the hyacinth girl.'
> - Yet when we came back, late, from the hyacinth garden,
> Your arms full, and your hair wet, I could not
> Speak, and my eyes failed, I was neither
> Living nor dead, and I knew nothing,
> Looking into the heart of light, the silence.

The 'fixing' of the symbols, which both Ellmann and Patterson attempt, seems to me a denial of their essential nature: it is exactly in their lack of fixity, in their underconnotation if we use that term as it is used in modern linguistics, that their power resides. This power is, I suggest, bound up with a psychological process which has been understood and applied in terms of the theory of association, and this theory is common both to Yeats and Eliot and posed at least one of the central problems with which their art had to come to terms. Association was one of the structuring categories of their art and one which we cannot deal with by turning it into a merely roundabout means of making conventionally meaningful statements, as I think these two examples do.

What these examples do reveal, however, is the problematic element in both Yeats' and Eliot's work that relates to 'association'. It is strange that the two great poets of our era in English should, on the surface of things at least, have so little similarity with one another. They are both

poets who recognisably belong to what we now call the 'modern movement' in literature and yet seem so different as to challenge our application to them of a single period definition. Our literary histories would be much neater had Yeats decently retired in 1906 and remained an interesting product of the fin de siècle and the Celtic twilight, and indeed several critics have maintained that Yeats was no more than such a marginal figure. L.C. Knights, for instance, argues against seeing Yeats as a major modern writer:

> Measured by potentiality, by aspiration, and by the achievement of a few poems, it is as a heroic failure that one is forced to consider Yeats's poetic career as a whole. The causes were complex. Something, no doubt, must be attributed to the literary tradition of the nineteenth century which, as he came to see so clearly, offered the very opposite of an incitement to maturity.[1]

Knights sees Yeats as irrevocably trapped by his origins, but as Al Alvarez has pointed out,[2] though Eliot has been the seminal critical influence on the past half-century of British literature the style which has had the greatest impact is that of Yeats. Donald Davie supports that view:

> ... nothing is more striking about poems in English over the last twenty years than the way in which poets have turned away from 'free verse', to using again the traditional metres. In fact poets today mostly adhere to traditional forms more strictly than Yeats did; yet there seems to be no doubt that no one has been so influential as Yeats in bringing about this marked reversion to metre.[3]

The paradox of Yeats is that one of the most accepted 'modern' poets has sponsored a reaction against what seemed, at one time, to be the very basis of modernism. And, indeed, what seems most modern about Yeats is

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1 L.C. Knights, Explorations (London: Chatto and Windus, 1946), p. 184.

2 A. Alvarez, 'Eliot and Yeats: Orthodoxy and Tradition', Twentieth Century, CLXII (1957), p. 149.

3 Donald Davie, 'Yeats, the Master of a Trade', in D. Donoghue (ed.) The Integrity of Yeats (Cork: Mercier Press, 1964); reprinted in Pritchard, W.B. Yeats, p. 308.

often what his admirers wish to save him from: the self-dramatisation, the personal system of mythology and the allegiance to an aristocratic social system, what Michael Hamburger describes as an 'absolute poetry':

> At the heart of every Romantic-Symbolist poet's aesthetic, then, there is a private religion, a religio poetae irreconcilable with the exigences of the public world ... If he fails to make (the appropriate) adjustment he will align himself with absolute political creeds, mistaking their monomania for a dedication akin to his own, and seduced by promises of order.[1]

It is in the area of creeds rather than styles which Yeats seems most modern, and yet there is no example of a poet more successfully and consciously modernising his style, though the modernisation is perhaps more noticeable because it is worked towards from a different kind of poetic style than it would have been otherwise. Yeats as a 'modern' remains a problematic figure, and it is possibly his problematic aspect that has made him so acceptable. As Monroe K. Spears suggests,

> Aside from other less explicable qualities, it is Yeats's inclusiveness, the fact that he is both solidly traditional and unquestionably modern, that has made him seem to many the supreme poet of the century, and certainly the most influential.[2]

Eliot's case is less problematic, at least if one does not consider his religious conversion and the 'Four Quartets' as an apostasy from the real challenges and achievements of modernism.

Between them Yeats and Eliot have divided the intellectual and poetic dominance of the high point of poetic achievement in our century in Britain: it is around the issues that they have posed and the examples that they have set that our critical debates have centred, despite the enormous

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1 Michael Hamburger, The Truth of Poetry (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1971), p. 107.

2 Monroe K. Spears, Dionysus and the City: Modernism in Twentieth Century Poetry (New York: Oxford University Press, 1970), p. 146.

differences in temperament and style which separate them. What I want to suggest in this thesis is that they are not as far apart as, on the surface, they might seem, and that a crucial linking concept both for their thought about poetry and their practice of it is 'association', and the implications of an associationist theory of language and of aesthetic experience. The concept of 'association' has been a powerful determinant in thinking about language, particularly in the English speaking countries, over the past three hundred years. Association, the automatic connection through memory of two discrete elements of experience, has been the very basis of the British empiricist school of philosophy and has remained prominent until our own time in the stimulus-response theories of language that have characterised, for instance, the behaviourists' approach. As so often happens with philosophical concepts, the time of its greatest literary application came at the point when its philosophical usefulness was almost over. As Noam Chomsky has written of the behaviourist version of the theory,

> No matter how successfully the study of stimulus-response connections, habit structures and so on is pursued, it will always fail to touch [the] central questions. The systems of knowledge and belief that underlie normal human behaviour simply cannot be described in terms of networks of association, fabrics of dispositions to respond, habit structures and the like. At least, this seems to be true of language ...[1]

The idea that association was the central governing principle of language and of all psychological processes was, however, one of the categorial conditions which informed the work of both Yeats and Eliot. It offered, potentially, an extremely democratic form of art which would be based on each individual's own associations with whatever was given by the poet,

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1 Noam Chomsky, Problems of Knowledge and Freedom (London: Fontana/ Collins, 1972), p. 44.

but that democratic conception was in the end negated by both poets. This thesis charts some of the contradictions embedded in the development of an associationist theory of poetry; the poetry produced in the light of this theory enabled me, as someone who did not share these poets' culture and tradition, to take their poetry on my own terms, but the very fact that people like me could do so, forced Yeats and Eliot into more and more extreme attempts to control the kind of experiences I and others might bring to their poetry. The subjectivity which associationist art encouraged had, in the end, to be denied, but it is a denial which has been turned back on Yeats and Eliot themselves by those who have followed them.

CHAPTER ONE

ASSOCIATIONISM

1) The Associationist Tradition

In its most basic ontological sense a poem is no more than a series of marks on paper or a series of sounds in the air; in the first it is static, implacably permanent in its shape, in the second it is fleeting, reformulated each time it is taken up by a different voice. But the poem as poem, as unit of communication, symbolisation, meaning, is neither of these; its existence is a field of force between two minds, one that creates and one that recreates, something that leaps between two poles of experience and exists only in that flight. Every individual word is a thing in flight, a movement between two speakers who give and take meaning, but it is also a flight in time, a movement through unending series of possibilities rather than a unit in a stable lexical universe. So too the poem is a movement in time, a slow transformation of itself through the possibilities generated by those multitudinous individual acts of communication. For in its very essence the poem written demands a reader, it assumes a reader or a set of readers as the corollary of its own existence. As Paul Ricoeur has said,

> A symbol exists ... where linguistic expression lends itself by its double or multiple meanings to a work of interpretation. What gives rise to this work is an intentional structure which consists not in the relation of meaning to things, but in an architecture of meaning, in a relation of meaning to meaning ... This texture is what makes interpretation possible, although the texture itself is made evident only through the actual movement of interpretation ... In general terms, every mythos involves a latent logos which demands to be exhibited. That is why there are no symbols without the beginning of interpretation; where one man dreams, prophesises or poeticizes, another rises up to interpret. Interpretation organically belongs to symbolic thought and its double meaning.[1]

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1 Paul Ricoeur, Freud and Philosophy: an essay in interpretation, trans. D. Savage (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1970), pp. 18-19.

Rocoeur's penultimate statement suggests an order of development which may be accurate as a primitive model but in no way reflects any actual creative situation. The symbol is created not so that there will arise an interpreter, but in a context of interpreters and interpretation. It will survive (perhaps) for use by interpreters it could not have envisaged, but it is not created in an interpretive vacuum. It comes into existence within a context of expectations and assumptions which it cannot ignore even if it challenges.

The ways in which we conceive of a poem's working, our attitudes to words and their workings, our attitudes to the processes and functions of our own minds, are the context in which the poem is created and the context in which the poem is read - and the two poles of the reading experience need have no correspondance one with the other, for what we think about how we think changes the way that we think. A simple instance is the Freudian slip: the attribution of significant meaning to accidental statements is a transformation in our way of thinking about how our thoughts manifest themselves to others. Such mistakes always existed, but their meaning has changed and they have been released not only for our normal interpretive attitude to others' speech, but have become a usable part of the writer's equipment, something he can rely upon his audience noticing and being aware of. As the theory passes into history - if it has not already done so - it will cease to be a natural means of symbolisation between writer and reader and return to being mere accident; its meaning will have to be reconstructed by the scholar, though no reconstruction will ever recreate the context of the original experience.

The choice of an instance from Freud is not accidental: no matter how outdated in many of its particularities Freud's theories now seem, it is

his picture of the mind with which we all work; his is the context in which our understanding of other people and ourselves takes shape. Freud's work represents one of those turning points in the history of man at which something radically new - no matter how much preparation had preceded it[1] - enters our universe and transforms all its significances. The same was true for a previous age of the work of Locke and the theory of the association of ideas. Locke is acknowledged by nearly all subsequent writers on psychological mechanisms as the source from which their concepts derive: David Hartley in his Observations on Man notes that, 'the word association, in the particular sense here affixed to it, was first brought into use by Mr Locke.'[2] Even Hume provides a backhanded compliment by accusing Locke of an original perversion of meaning which he intends to put right,

> I here make use of these terms, impression and idea, in a sense different from what is usual, and I hope this liberty will be allowed me. Perhaps I rather restore the word, idea, to its original sense, from which Mr. Locke had perverted it, in making it stand for all our perceptions.[3]

That Hume has to distinguish his usage from Locke's at the very outset of his work is a significant pointer to the speed with which Locke's terminology had become the normal context of thought about the nature of the mind, since Hume's work was published within a half century of Locke's. For over two hundred years Locke's chapter on 'The Association of Ideas' in An Essay Concerning Human Understanding was the starting point for all who were concerned about the workings of the human mind.

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1 See Lancelot Law Whyte, The Unconscious before Freud (London: Tavistock, 1962).

2 David Hartley, Observations on Man (London: J. Johnson, 1791), I, p. 65.

3 David Hume, A Treatise on Human Nature, ed. L.A. Selby-Bigge (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1967), p. 2n.

The essence of Locke's revolutionary theory was the application to mental phenomena of formulations derived from the mechanical sciences, a project inspired by a visit to Galileo. Locke develops his theory of association[1] in order to account for the irrational in human behaviour, which, as a rationalist, he believes to be a flaw in character and a falling off from the highest standards of human capability. Thus he identifies certain ideas - as Hume pointed out, by 'ideas' Locke meant all mental phenomena including those derived from the senses - which,

> have a natural Correspondence and Connexion one with another: It is the Office and Excellency of our Reason to trace these, and hold them together in that Union and Correspondence which is founded in their peculiar Beings.[2]

The important phrase here is 'their peculiar Beings', for what Locke is suggesting is that reason makes connexions between elements in consciousness which are true to their nature in external reality, that what holds between ideas in the mind also holds between things in the world.

In contrast, Locke asserts the existence of certain connections made purely by the apprehending consciousness, connections which arise by chance and have no power to reveal the real natures of the elements referred to as they exist in the external world.

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1 For general studies of the background to associationist theories of psychology, see Melvin H. Marx and William H. Hillix, Systems and Theories in Psychology (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1963) ch. 6; Murphy Gardner, Historical Introduction to Modern Psychology (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1949) particularly pp. 80-145 and 265-283, and the entry on 'association' under 'Psychology' in Paul Edwards (ed.) The Encyclopedia of Philosophy (London: Collier-Macmillan, 1967) Vol. 7, pp. 15 ff.
For a study of the aesthetic implications see Walter Jackson Bate, From Classic to Romantic: Premises of Taste in Eighteenth Century England (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1949), Ch. IV.

2 John Locke, An Essay Concerning Human Understanding, ed. Peter H. Nidditch (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975), Bk. 2, ch. xxxiii, sect. 5, p. 395.

> Ideas that in themselves are not at all of kin, come to be so united in some Mens Minds, that it is very hard to separate them, they always keep in company, and the one no sooner at any time comes into the Understanding but its Associate appears with it; and if they are more than two which are thus united, the whole gang always inseparable shew themselves together.[1]

The 'some' is significant, for Locke uses this analysis of how certain false ideas come to be associated in some people's minds as a stick with which to beat his political opponents who deviate from the purity of 'reason'. However, as Locke continues with his exposition he seems to find more and more to be covered by his new discovery, though he refrains still from including them under the commendatory term 'natural':

> ... to this, perhaps, might be justly attributed most of the Sympathies and Antipathies observable in Men, which work as strongly, and produce as regular Effects, as if they were Natural, and are therefore called so, though they at first had no other Original but the accidental Connexion of two Ideas, which either the strength of the first Impression, or future Indulgence so united, that they always afterwards kept company together in that Man's mind, as if they were but one Idea.[2]

Experiences which we undergo create in us, according to Locke, an expectation that if one element in that experience is given or remembered we will 'naturally' call up the idea of the others, but he describes such expectations and the connections they produce as a 'blindfold' since they prevent men from seeing the true connections which pertain in the world rather than in the mind and which, if we know, we can use to control and order that world.

It was the latter point upon which Hume was to seize, arguing that all that we ordinarily described as reasoning was in fact nothing but a type of 'association of ideas', and revealing that the causal connections which science prided itself on discovering in the external world were no more than 'constant conjunctions' producing a more than usually certain

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1 Ibid., p. 395.

2 Ibid., sect. 7, p. 396.

association of ideas: their connection existed purely in the mind of the perceiver, and as his association of them had never been challenged by events he took the connection to be universal. Hume's attack, following on Berkeley's, was to radically alter the scope of Locke's theory, for it made all mental phenomena subject to the law of association, and in the process considerably raised the status of the imagination in the hierarchy of mental faculties:

> Reason can never show us the connexion of one object with another, tho' aided by experience, and the observation of their constant conjunction in all past instances. When the mind, therefore, passes from the idea or impression of one object to the idea or belief of another it is not determined by reason, but by certain principles, which associate together the ideas of these objects, and unite them in the imagination.[1]

Hume makes the associative process the very core of the mind's workings and of the way we engage ourselves with the world. In other words we can have no insight into the world which does not depend for its form on the way that our minds are structured; there is no faculty, as in Locke, which can rise above the process of associations - they are no longer, as Kant was moved to discover, a blindfold, but the very lens with which we see.

It is important to recognise that, despite the fact that it developed from an attempt to explain mental phenomena on a mechanistic pattern, associationism does not entail a materialist conception of the world. Such has very often been taken to be the case because of the importance of Hartley in eighteenth century associationist theory, but its falsity is revealed both by the theories of Hume - which make no claims for the existence of the material world at all - and those of Berkeley who was, as A.A. Luce puts it, an 'immaterialist'. Hartley's importance derives from the fact that he gave the associationist doctrine the appearance

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1 Hume, A Treatise on Human Nature, p. 92.

of being an empirically established truth rather than a philosophical theory, and one which underlay many previously accepted observations about the nature of man,

> ... all that has been delivered by the ancients and moderns, concerning the power of habit, custom, example, education, authority, party-prejudice, the manner of learning the manual and the liberal arts &c., goes upon this doctrine as its foundation.[1]

Hartley tied the doctrine adumbrated by his predecessors to the physical nature of man: in the light of biological discoveries he was able to assert that associations were, in effect, movements of physical particles in the brain which had taken on particular patterns from the impress of externally induced sensations, these patterns being repeated whenever one of its parts is re-experienced, either as sensation or as idea.

> It is to be observed that, in the successive associations, the power of raising the ideas is only asserted according to the order in which the association is made. Thus, if the impressions A, B, C, be always made in the order of the alphabet, B impressed alone will not raise a, but c only.[2]

Hartley's theory represents the most mechanistic and materialistic version of the associationist doctrine, but in developing it he did not ignore the need to account for the existence of aesthetic experience, suggesting that each element in the beautiful (he makes no significant distinction between a work of art and a natural scene) brings its own specific associations which work together to create an overall impression of pleasure: like the utilitarians of the next century he makes pleasure the chief end of aesthetic satisfaction.

> The pleasant tastes, and smells, and the fine colours of fruits and flowers, the melody of the birds, and the grateful warmth or coolness of the air, in the proper seasons, transfer miniatures of these pleasures upon rural scenes, which start up instantaneously so mixed with each other ... as to be separately indiscernible.[3]

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1 Hartley, Observations on Man, I, p. 65.

2 Ibid., p. 66.

3 Ibid., p. 419.

The scene, natural or otherwise, thus gathers its powers not from specific attributes of its own, but rather from the 'miniature' representations of sensual pleasures which the sight of it arouses in the spectator. Its powers are not specific to its aesthetic organisation but to the multiplicity of associations that it can generate. The measures are often quantifiable too in terms of the intensity of the associations it generates:

> If there is a precipice, a cataract, a mountain of snow &c. in one part of the scene, the nascent ideas of fear and horrour magnify and enliven all the other ideas, and by degrees pass into pleasures, by suggesting the security from pain.[1]

Hartley has some quite specific points to make about the literary arts and describes the working of metaphor in a way not dissimilar to that of Rémy de Gourmont in his Problème du Style (1905), which was so influential in the development of the criticism of Eliot and Pound. Hartley presents the process as being based to a large extent on surprise, surprise arising from the lack of accord between the vehicle of the metaphor and our normal associations of the tenor; and accounts for cliché by our gradual assimilation of this associative connection to our normal patterns of habitual association:

> New figurative words seem to strike and please us chiefly from that impropriety which appears at first sight, upon their application to the things denoted by them, and from the consequent heightening of the propriety, as soon as it is duly perceived. For when figurative words have recurred so often as to excite the secondary ideas instantaneously, and without any previous harshness to the imagination, they lose their peculiar beauty and force.[2]

Once again the effect does not lie so much in the words themselves or any of their specific properties, but in the associations we receive from them:

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1 Ibid., p. 419.

2 Ibid., p. 429.

> Besides this, figurative expressions illuminate our discourse and writings by transferring the properties, associations and emotions belonging to one thing upon another.[1]

Hartley here retains a semblance of rigour in the relationship between a word and its associations by the use of the word 'belonging', as though there were some definite and limited number of associations to any one word, but the relativity he implies is there to be exploited.

Nearly all eighteenth century theorists of the arts assumed a similar pattern for the workings of the work of art upon the mind: the work triggers off a certain range of associations in the mind of the spectator and it is the process of these which constitute the real aesthetic experience rather than any formal elements belonging to the work. Admittedly Burke, in his section on Association in The Sublime and the Beautiful, reverts to a more Lockean analysis by retaining association as only one element in a more complex process, and a generally obfuscating one at that:

> But as it must be allowed that many things affect us after a certain manner, not by any natural powers they have for that purpose, but by association; so it would be absurd, on the other hand, to say that all things affect us by association only; since some things must have been originally and naturally agreeable or disagreeable, from which the others derive their associated powers; and it would be, I fancy, to little purpose to look for the cause of our passions in association, until we fail of it in the natural properties of things.[2]

However, Burke's analysis of the situation does not prevent him almost immediately afterwards from reverting to associationist terminology to explain certain elements in the production of the sublime, which he considers to be the most important constituent of aesthetic contemplation:

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1 Ibid.

2 Edmund Burke, A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origins of our Ideas of the Sublime and the Beautiful, in The Works of the Right Honourable Edmund Burke (London: C. and J. Rivington, 1826), Vol. I, Part IV, sect. ii, p. 258.

> ...whatever is fitted to produce such a tension (in the nerves) must be productive of a passion similar to terror, and consequently must be the source of the sublime ... With regard to such things as affect by the associated idea of danger, there can be no doubt but that they produce terror and act by some modification of that passion.[1]

The problem which Burke was attempting to overcome by his retention of the Lockean dichotomy of mental faculties into rational intellect and irrational association was one that had haunted the associationist theory from the start and which was to have profound effects in its later development - the relativity of all human experience. If everything were to be the product of personal associative connections, how could there be any agreement among men about the real nature of what they experienced? In the context of art, how could there be any agreement as to the experience engendered by a work of art and the value to be put upon it? Much of the tension within eighteenth century aesthetic discussions springs from exactly this conflict of beliefs, a belief in the causal associationist basis for our ideas and attitudes and, at the same time, a belief that there is some overriding standard of truth and reality. The neo-classic assertion of a universal truth is moderated into a relative truth based on common experience. Locke foresaw the problem when he suggested

> that those who have Children, or the charge of their Education, would think it worth their while diligently to watch, and carefully prevent the undue Connexion of Ideas in the Minds of young People.[2]

Hartley outlines the difficulty when Locke's model is accepted as the central one in all psychological mechanisms:

> Every person may find, that his taste in these things receives considerable changes in his progress through life; and may, by careful observation, trace up these changes to the associations

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1 Ibid., pp. 262-263.

2 Locke, Essay Concerning Human Understanding, Bk. 2, ch xxxiii, sect. 8, p. 397.

> that have caused them. And yet, since mankind have a general resemblance to each other, both in their internal make, and external circumstances, there will be some general agreements about these things as common to all mankind. The agreements will also become perpetually greater, as the persons under consideration are supposed to agree more in their genius, studies, external circumstances, &c. Hence may be seen, in part, the foundation of the general agreements observable in critics concerning the beauties of poetry, as well as that of their particular disputes and differences.[1]

Hartley is here carefully straddling the divide between an innate structure of mind which will link all men in common patterns of thought and the alternative of correlations based only on accidental circumstance, i.e. on similar social conditioning and experience. It is an important divide for the arts, since, if the latter is true, there will be no possibility of a common or universal reaction to the work of art: all reactions will be the product of conditioning factors and agreement will be possible only when people share similar patterns of experience.

It is Hume who presents the contradiction most clearly in his essays:

> Thus, though the principles of taste be universal, and nearly, if not entirely the same in all men; yet few are qualified to give judgment on any work of art, or establish their own sentiment as a standard of beauty. The organs of internal sensation are seldom so perfect as to allow the general principles their full play, and produce a feeling correspondent to those principles.[2]

There <u>are</u> universal principles apparently, but by what right do the 'few' come to be their appropriate interpreters? If all experience is based on association, how do the associations of these particular people come to have a certain kind of pre-eminence? Hume is asserting a correspondence

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1 Hartley, <u>Observations on Man</u>, I, p. 430.

2 David Hume, 'Of the Standard of Taste', <u>Essays: Moral, Political, and Literary</u>, ed. T H. Green and T.H. Grose (London: Longmans, Green, 1875), I, p. 278.

between the 'rules' of antiquity and the nature of the human mind (and of a few individual human minds) which cannot be accounted for within the terms of his metaphysic. There is here the kind of historical gap that Goldmann points out with regard to Descartes: Descartes, Goldmann suggests,[1] was himself a Christian and therefore built his Christianity into his philosophical theory, but the real implications of his theory - implications which Descartes' Christianity prevented him from grasping - were atheistic, or perhaps non-theistic. So Hume's theory insists on the principles of neoclassical perfection while in its essence it denies the possibility of any such universality. The actual basis for the agreement among the 'few' as to the proper virtues of art is social, as Archibald Alison was to show in his Principles of Taste:

> The diversity of tastes corresponds to the diversity of occupations: it is only in the higher stations of life or liberal professions that we expect to find men either of delicate or comprehensive taste. The inferior station of life, by contracting the knowledge and affections of men within very narrow limits produces insensibly a similar contraction in their notions of the beautiful and sublime.[2]

Precedence in social position is assumed to involve the necessary preconditions of aesthetic good taste, because it allows the fullest development of the mind and therefore the fullest associative powers. But if the basis of all minds is the same, why might not some other set of preconditions be equally valid for the appreciation of art? Indeed, why might some types of art which do not correspond with the associative processes of those 'in the higher stations in life' be just as good, if not better, than those that do?

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1 Lucien Goldmann, The Hidden God, p. 8.

2 Archibald Alison, Essays on the Nature and Principles of Taste (Edinburgh: Bell and Bradfute, 1790), pp. 62-63.

It is questions like these that lie behind the 'Preface' to Lyrical Ballads. Romanticism was to solve the problem of relativity - at least in theory - by positing 'imagination' as the faculty which escaped the ring of conditioning, in much the same way that the eighteenth century theorists had asserted the virtues of 'reason'. Where previously the classical work of art succeeded because perfectly formed to the principles of the human mind itself, the work of art is now seen as succeeding because the artistic imagination is in perfect continuity with the principles of the universe, the principles which stand behind the phenomenal world of appearance. This change, however, does not do away with the associationist theory, but rather is dependent on its development. The possibility is seized upon that minds more 'natural' than those educated in classics, minds having more natural associative processes, might be the most appropriate locus for the aesthetic experience. Thus Wordsworth announces his intent in the preface to Lyrical Ballads as being,

> ... to choose incidents and situations from common life, and to relate and describe them, throughout, as far as was possible, in a selection of language really used by man, and, at the same time to throw over them a certain colouring of the imagination, whereby ordinary things should be presented to the mind in an unusual aspect; and further, and above all, to make these incidents and situations interesting by tracing in them truly though not ostentatiously, the primary laws of our nature: chiefly as far as regards the manner in which we associate ideas in a state of excitement.[1]

The locus of associative activity has shifted from the areas assumed to be most appropriate by writers such as Alison, but the poem remains essentially based on the principle of association. In fact, the choice of dramatic situations as the subject matter is to allow the 'colouring of the imagination'

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1 William Wordsworth, 'Preface to Lyrical Ballads', Collected Prose Works ed. Alexander B. Grosart (London: Edward Moxon, 1876), II, p. 81.

which the writer gives to ordinary things to be an integral part of the poem rather than an external addition: the artistic imagination which has escaped the mechanistic determinism of Hartleian association turns back to that as its subject matter.

For Hume only the classics escaped the trivialising effects of 'fashion' by virtue of their consonance with the essential structure of the human mind, but for Wordsworth there is a contemporary equivalent, the rustic people who, 'being less under the influence of social vanity, ... convey their feelings and notions in simple and unelaborated expressions':[1] a classicism of the present, of the actual which the eighteenth century could not envisage. The theory of the imagination which marks the beginning of the Romantic movement should not be allowed, however, to obscure the central continuities with associationist modes of thought. Coleridge does not dismiss the idea of association or its importance within the psyche. What he insisted upon was that we are not trapped passively within the associationist process, that certain elements of the psyche work <u>on</u> associations rather than being worked by them: the mind is creative and controlling, not mechanical and controlled. The appearance that Coleridge sometimes gives of not being concerned about association as a mental principle comes from his concentration on the creative act, rather than on the act of appreciating the work of art which was the primary interest of eighteenth century aestheticians. His metaphor in this respect is instructive:

'The air I breathe is the condition of my life and not its cause.'[2]

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1 Ibid., p. 81.

2 Samuel Taylor Coleridge, <u>Biographia Literaria</u> (London: Everyman, 1965), ch. vii, p. 71.

Association is the condition in which thought occurs, but not its cause. Coleridge in the following passage goes on to present an example of the associative process at work:

> Seeing a mackerel it may happen that I immediately think of gooseberries, because I at the same time ate mackerel with gooseberries as the sauce. The first syllable of the latter word being that which co-existed with the image of the bird so called, I may then think of a goose. In the next moment the image of a swan may arise before me, though I had never seen the two birds together. In the former instances, I am conscious that their co-existence in time was the circumstance that enabled me to recollect them; and equally conscious am I, that the latter was recalled to me by a joint operation of likeness and contrast ... the accident of seeing two objects at the same moment acts as a distinguishable cause from that of having seen them in the same place: and the true practical general law of association is this, that whatever makes certain parts of a total impression more vivid or distinct than the rest will determine the mind to recall these in preference to others equally linked together by the common condition of contemporaniety or ... continuity. But the will itself by confining and intensifying the attention may arbitrarily give vividness to any object whatsoever.[1]

It is the final sentence that proclaims our freedom to create our own associational patterns; we are not trapped forever within the accidental patterns imposed upon us by our own experience. Wordsworth had escaped the accidental, the contingencies of individual life, by returning for his source and his inspiration to what he considered to be the most natural context for human life and that which, therefore, provided the most appropriate mental equipment for the poet who, to succeed, must achieve the optimum possibilities of the human mind; Coleridge insists to a much greater extent on the mind's freedom to utilise any of its contents in creating new patterns of association, though that possibility is only finally fulfilled through transcendental religious insight.

The changes in thought which I have been charting here are partly

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1 Ibid., pp. 72-73.

owing to a shift in aesthetic interest from the role of the spectator to the role of the creator. For the eighteenth century theorist the creative process is essentially a mechanical one - it is the nature of the receiving mind that must be analysed in order to discover the principles on which the artist must build his artifact in order that it will have the appropriate effects. On the other hand, Coleridge's concern is nearly exclusively with the creative side of the artistic process: it is the powers of the poet as seer with which he is concerned, with the imagination as the simulacrum of the divine 'I am', as the central expression of man's insight into the nature of his universe and thus of the divine. It is poetry as religious philosophy:

> What Mr. Wordsworth will produce it is not for me to prophesy: but I could pronounce with the liveliest convictions what he is capable of producing. It is the first genuine philosophic poem.[1]

Coleridge's subsequent criticism of Wordsworth's poetry, however, emphasises the extent to which Coleridge saw his friend's shift of associational context as mere evasion: there was no poetic language which would be the language of ordinary men. Implicitly Wordsworth had recognised this when he wrote that the poet, though a 'man speaking to men' was

> a man, it is true, endowed with more lively sensibility, more enthusiasm and tenderness, who has greater knowledge of human, and a more comprehensive soul, than are supposed to be common among mankind.[2]

Thus the context of associations in which the poetic work can be understood come to be those of that peculiar and gifted creature, the artist, and the first steps towards avant garde disdain of the audience - whose psychological

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1 Ibid., p. 275.

2 Wordsworth, 'Preface to Lyrical Ballads, Collected Prose Works, (London: Edmond Moxon, 1876), II, pp. 87-88.

development must be inferior - have been taken. The philosophic intent of both men, however, led to these ideas being developed and elucidated in the poetry, rather than being utilised by it, so that The Prelude becomes a search through the poet's own mind for those significant elements in his own experience which justify him in his vocation as poet through the comprehensiveness of his soul. The discovery of the necessary pattern in contingent experience is the essential prelude to the actual acceptance of the bardic mantle.

Though the poetry of the Romantics - or at least some of it - was to become influential in the first quarter of the nineteenth century, the critical writings took a much longer time to become influential. Isobel Armstrong points out that,

> Mid-nineteenth century criticism was, to borrow the term used by Abrams in The Mirror and the Lamp, predominantly a pragmatic criticism, that is, the emphasis was almost invariably on the human or social reference of the work of art, on its effect on the reader and hence on the needs of the reader.[1]

Views such as those expressed by A.H. Hallam in defence of Tennyson, and which were to influence later writers - Yeats refers appreciatively to Hallam's essay - were untypical of the period, and yet here again we see a pattern which even at this point, has repeated several times in our discussion; a critical theory which is developed as the justification of existing innovations in poetry or the arts becomes itself the dynamic of new transformations in technique and the exploration of new areas of experience. Hallam's contemporaries were most concerned with what came to be known as the 'psychological' school of poetry, poetry which used as material the workings of the human mind understood in associationist terms,

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1 Isobel Armstrong, Victorian Scrutinies (London: The Athlone Press, 1972), p. 6.

and despite his critical innovations he did not disagree with them as to that context for the poetic act, only as to how the poem could best be fitted to our knowledge of the mind's workings. To quote Armstrong again:

> [for Hallam] the modern consciousness is split and fragmented: sensation, thought and feeling no longer work harmoniously together [Hallam here is extraordinarily prophetic of T.S. Eliot's dissociated sensibility] but have been cut off from one another and directed into many different kinds of social activity. We can never return to the earlier unity - 'repentance is unlike innocence'. Hallam's assured acceptance of the situation ... is achieved because he is quite content to let the poetry of 'Sensation' develop in its own sphere of activity, which, he feels, will almost certainly predominate over the impure poetry of 'reflection'. Morbidity, destructive analysis, cannot impinge on the poetry of sensation because it is created out of 'a world of images', by which he means pictures of the external world in the mind ...[1]

For Hallam poetry should not be an examination of the associative process at work in some mind - whether the poet's or some character's revealed by the poet's 'negative capability' as in Browning's monologues - but rather association at work. The poem is the presentation of stimuli to association, stimuli which are equivalent to any of the other sensations which we receive in our ordinary life and which are the course of and the trigger for our associational experiences. The poetry of sensation assumes the existence of the laws of association and merely presents pictures which will be the locus for the reader's mental activity. It is a poetry which must by its very nature be more difficult than other kinds of poetry since it demands more effort on the part of the reader, more creative participation:

> For since the emotions of the poet, during composition, follow a regular law of association, it follows that their progress up to the harmonious prospect of the whole, and to perceive the proper dependence of every step on that which preceded it,

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1 Ibid., p. 19.

> it is absolutely necessary to start from the same point, i.e. to clearly apprehend the leading sentiment in the poet's mind, by their conformity to which the host of suggestions are arranged ... Since this demand on the reader for activity when he was to peruse his author in a luxurious passiveness is the very thing that moves his bile, it is obvious that those writers will always be most popular who require the least degree of emotion.[1]

Hallam's conception of value in poetry sometimes seems to replace the quantitive idea of the number of associations produced with that of the unusualness and therefore the difficulty of the associations produced e.g.:

> Love, friendship, ambition, religion &c., are matters of daily experience, even amongst imaginative tempers. The forces of association, therefore, are ready to work in these directions, and little effort of will is necessary to follow the artist.[2]

Hallam's writings proved to be prophetic of much of the direction of poetry in the century after his article was published in 1831, but that success was due to the fact that he had worked out the logical application to art of a psychological theory which was reaching then its apogee of popular diffusion, particularly in the work of the elder Mill, whose Analysis of the Phenomena of the Human Mind is the most rigorously (and also derivatively) associationist of all the theoretical works I have mentioned. Mill writes as though Coleridge and the German philosophy had never existed and, significantly for my own purposes, refers to Alison's Essays on Taste in order to explain the workings of association in connection with aesthetic experience. Mill, however, does add to associationist thinking in one important respect by positing a less quantitative basis to the process, one involving the amalgamation of various associations into a new whole:

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1 A.H. Hallam, 'On Some Characteristics of Modern Poetry', in Armstrong, Victorian Scrutinies, p. 89. Originally published in the Englishman's Magazine, i (August 1831), pp. 616-628.

2 Ibid., p. 90.

> When two or more ideas have often been repeated together, and the association has become very strong, they sometimes spring up in such close combination as not to be distinguishable. Some cases of sensation are analogous. For example, when a wheel, on the seven parts of which the seven prismatic colours are respectively painted, is made to revolve rapidly, it appears not of seven colours, but of one uniform colour white. By the rapidity of succession, the several sensations cease to be distinguishable: they run, as it were together, and a new sensation, compounded of all the seven, but apparently a simple one, is the result. Ideas, also, which have been so often conjoined that whenever one exists in the mind, the others immediately exist along with it, seem to run into one another, to coalesce as it were, and out of many form one idea; which idea, however in reality complex, appears to be no less simple, than any one of those of which it is compounded.[1]

In Mill's description is contained the first step in British empiricist thought towards a transformation of quantitative into qualitative associative process; from association conceived of as a chain extended in time, to a single unit apprehended instantaneously in depth.

The latter development was to be much more vigorously proposed by the younger Mill, who developed the metaphor implied in 'compounded' in the light of the new chemical sciences and was therefore able to present the possibility of a fusion of different elements in the creation of a new whole. In so doing, however, he was only recapitulating in empirical, semi-scientific terms what had already been known to the idealist tradition and which Coleridge had defined in the secondary imagination:

> It dissolves, diffuses, dissipates, in order to recreate; or where this process is rendered impossible, yet still, at all events, it struggles to idealize and unify.[2]

This process, of course, is to be contrasted in Coleridge's view with fancy, which "equally with the ordinary memory ... must receive its materials ready made from the law of association".[3]

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1 James Mill, Analysis of the Phenomena of the Human Mind, ed. John Stuart Mill (London: Longmans Green Reader and Dyer, 1869), I, p. 90.

2 Coleridge, Biographia Literaria, p. 167.

3 Ibid., p. 167.

Coleridge's distinction, however, is not altogether different from that made by Mill, for as we saw from his own example the associative principle still works, but it works in a controlled way - for the artist. Coleridge has almost nothing to say about how it might work for the reader of a literary work, which is Mill's main concern: it is in Carlyle's writings that the possible significance of these experiential wholes is made clear. Carlyle raises to its highest intensity the Coleridgean view of the possibility of an insight through the things of the temporal world into the world of the eternal:

> In a symbol there is concealment and yet revelation, by silence and speech acting together, comes a double significance... For it is here that Fantasy with her mystic wonderland plays into the small prose domain of Sense, and becomes incorporate therewith. In the Symbol proper, what we can call a Symbol, there is ever, more or less distinctly and directly, some embodiment and revelation of the Infinite: the Infinite is made to blend itself with the Finite, to stand visible, and, as it were, attainable there.[1]

The obscurities of a passage like this reveal a spirited application of content to form. The significant factor, though, is the correlation between the Infinite and Fantasy. It was, of course, stock late eighteenth century theory of the sublime that the mind is more moved by that which it cannot fully grasp, and, in mechanistic terms, contain:the Alps rapidly became the traditional focus of this kind of experience. In terms of associationist psychology it is evident that something which is not quite clear and precise could be more potent than something which is altogether evident: it will also be more lasting in its effects since the possible associations will not so easily be reduced to banality by repeated experience.

Noticeably, Carlyle's presentation is in active terms: Fantasy 'plays'

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1 Thomas Carlyle, Sartor Resartus, The Works of Thomas Carlyle, (London: Chapman and Hall, 1895), Vol. I, Bk. III, ch. iii, p. 175.

into the domain of Sense, but, as in more traditional associationist theory, the work gains its power from its ability to draw forth a series of reactions which are, as it were, completions of the object by the observer. The model is an imploded version of the associationist one, if you like, since, instead of a complete but simple object producing incomplete series of associative responses, we are given an incomplete object which has to be constantly filled out by the observer. The symbol is an open structure within which the mind has to create its own connections, but through which the Infinite - possibly because of the infinite suggestibility of the object - can enter into the ordinary world. The Infinite as the creative force in the universe and the infinite creativity of the individual mind meet in the Symbol, which allows each its fullest scope, but they meet because of Fantasy's 'mystic wonderland' - because of the possibility of filling out resemblances and connections which are not fully outlined by the object itself; because, in other words, of associations, though association conceived more in terms of Mill's 'compound' than Alison's chain, and much more in terms of Coleridge's example than Hartley's. Instead of associations drawn out at length within the container of the mind, it is association projected into the container of the symbol.

That there is no basic contradiction between these two positions is perhaps revealed by the fact that, as Lehmann points out in The Symbolist Aesthetic in France 1885-1895, Carlyle was an important influence on the symbolist movement in that period, while, at the same time, its chief theoretician uses a language which is much more directly in the empiricist tradition of British psychologists with which I have been mainly concerned:

> Khan, the principal aesthetician of symbolism, held that all processes of thought are rigidly determined by facts to which he gave the approximate name of laws of association: laws which brooked no interference by the individual choice of the

> thinking subject, for whom, therefore, poetry was nothing more than a plucking out on the emotional strings of his readers those chords which the association laws sanctioned, and whose work was directed to securing conditions in verse writing in which these virtually impersonal laws should be least impeded by outward conventions.[1]

The link between Khan and Carlyle springs from a confluence of direction in their thought which is, in miniature, the model of the whole historical development I have been tracing: Carlyle's Symbolism was largely mystical, and therefore anti-rational; Khan's materialism, based on empiricist rationality, leads to a poetry which can be explained rationally but which works on an irrational basis, i.e. the laws of association can be explained, but they give rise to experiences in different individuals which have no rational connections and so nothing in common. James Webb, in The Flight from Reason, reveals how easily the two could be confused:

> ... the second Vogue appeared with contributions from Paul Adam, Henri de Regnier and Gustave Khan. This last named in his account of the various literary movements of the era, found it necessary to dissociate himself and the Symbolists from the occult movement. They were mystics of a sort, he admitted, but not occultists '- at least not M. Jean Moreas and I'. The 'at least' is telling: some Symbolists were certainly occultists, and the temper of Bohemia was such that the two camps might easily be confused.[2]

The irrational and the anti-rational were united on the kind of poetry which they were writing, though their explanations of how it worked might differ. Anna Balakian describes their poetry as being,

> a communication between the poet and the reader through an image or a series of images that have subjective as well as objective values, while their objective existence is unilateral, their subjective meaning is multi-dimensional and therefore suggested rather than designated.[3]

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1 A.G. Lehmann, The Symbolist Aesthetic in France, 1885-1895 (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1968, 2nd edition), p. 46.

2 James Webb, The Flight from Reason (London: Macdonald, 1971), pp. 100-101.

3 Anna Balakian, The Symbolist Movement: A Critical Appraisal (New York: Random House, 1967), p. 38.

The suggestiveness can include both the 'speech and silence' of Carlyle, an object to be filled out by the perceiving mind, and the automatic associations of Khan; both are united on the passivity of the perceiver. In Carlyle's case the active mind, paradoxically perhaps, can only come into operation in a situation where the mind is not engaged with the world in any particular activity, it is a transcendental operation of the mind free from the necessities of and therefore from acting in the material world; for Khan the mind is the passive recipient of its perceptions, triggering off the various associations which constitute the aesthetic experience.

The clarity which, in the eighteenth century, provided the greatest exercise for the imagination conceived as an associative process has been transformed into an external obscurity which will generate the maximum number of subjective responses around the objectivity of its presentation. The poem becomes, not a direct mode of communication, but an object, a 'sensation' in Hallam's sense, from which a set of experiences only marginally controlled by the writer will emanate. The experiences, it was progressively realised, could be controlled only generically, as those of beauty, or infinity, or pity or whatever. Their specific nature had to remain unknowable; since it would vary from one reader to the next only its general nature could be predictable. The poetry becomes an object as mysterious as the infinity towards which it points, as secret as the consciousness from which it emanates and as private as every individual reader in the act of its reading. There can be, in effect, no communication as such, only an experience whose significance will lie in its perfection of its kind: the silence which Carlyle discerned as a central element in all symbolic structures has become the end of poetry rather than an integral

part of it. In its attempt to seek a path from ordinary life to the transcendental silence the poem seeks to be a part of that transcendence, available only to those whose minds have, like the poet's, escaped from mundane reality into a higher experience of truth. The poem, in the end, turns its back on all but its creator, whose mind alone is fitted with the appropriate associative materials to respond fully to the words on the page, who alone is aware of the silence out of which the words are created.

Out of the associative context comes a radically different kind of poetry from anything that preceded it. Of course, the poems can be read like other poems and will share certain kinds of qualities with previous poetic techniques, but the stance which the poem takes up in the face of the reader is entirely changed. It has ceased to be a means of communication in any ordinary sense: it is a stimulus to subjective experience and this precisely because the process of communication itself had come to be seen in terms of a stimulus response structure.[1] The form of the poetry is shaped by this categorial assumption about the nature of the mind, and that form determines certain limits of 'meaning', certain boundaries to the things that can be said, by the poet. It is the discovery of those boundaries by Yeats and Eliot to which we must now turn.

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1 For an analysis in detail of the modern versions of associationist theory - and no matter how often it is buried its ghost still haunts the psychology and philosophy of language - see Bernard Harrison, Meaning and Structure: an Essay in the Philosophy of Language (New York: Harper and Row, 1972). Harrison sees the associationist concept as central to what he describes as the 'empiricist theory of language' and gives an example of it in recent philosophy from W.V. O. Quine (p. 11): 'the power of a non-verbal stimulus to elicit a given sentence commonly depends on earlier associations of sentences with sentences ... Thus someone mixes the contents of two test tubes, observes a given tint, and says, "There was copper in it". Here the sentence is elicited by a non-verbal stimulus, but the stimulus depends for its efficacy upon an earlier network of associations of words with words, viz. one's learning of chemical theory.'

2) Yeats and the Associationist Tradition

Yeats's position within our literary history is an interestingly ambivalent one. For many, Yeats is the pre-eminent poet of his own era, the one whose work goes furthest in the development of what is distinctively 'modern' both in the poetry and in the consciousness of our age.[1] For others, for instance Leavis,[2] Yeats never escaped from the debilitating effect of the romantic twilight of the 1890s. Yeats himself encouraged such a view with his famous description of himself and his literary associates, particularly Lady Gregory, as the 'last Romantics'. The conception of Yeats which insists upon his being at the end of a particular tradition in modern poetry has been given recent support by Harold Bloom's study of Yeats in terms of the influence on him of the Romantic tradition:[3]

> ... the whole body of this book will tell the continuous story of the lifelong influence of Shelley, Blake, and Romantic tradition in general upon Yeats, but these stories, to be coherent, must rely upon some understanding of the problem of poetic influence, and of the particular kind of Romantic tradition within which Yeats was influenced. Most specifically, Yeats's immediate tradition could be described as the internalization of quest romance, and Yeats's most characteristic kind of poem could be called the dramatic lyric of internalized quest ...

It is in order to establish more fully and on the level of aesthetic theory the continuity of Yeats's work with that of his Romantic forebears that I want to attempt a structural comparison of Yeats's early aesthetic writings with those of the Scottish eighteenth century aesthetician Archibald Alison.

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1 For this, of course, there is the implicit testimony of innumerable critical works - see K.G.W. Cross, R.T. Dunlop, Bibliography of Yeats Criticism (London: Macmillan, 1971) and John E. Stoll, The Great Deluge: A Yeats Bibliography (New York: Whitston Publishing Company, 1971).

2 F.R. Leavis, New Bearings in English Poetry (Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1963), pp. 44-47.

3 Harold Bloom, Yeats (London: Oxford University Press, 1972), pp. 4-5.

Alison's position vis-a-vis the Romantic movement is very similar, on the level of theory, to Yeats's position with regard to 'modernism'. Alison's writings come as the summation of the previous half-century's work in aesthetics. His originality lies less in any individual argument or conception, but rather in rearranging the overall pattern of previous thought so that it emerges in a configuration which is the starting point for something radically new. Alison's Essays on the Nature and Principles of Taste[1] were a major influence on Wordsworth and, through their many reprintings between 1790 and the 1820s, helped to establish the sensibility of the new century.

E.L Tuveson describes the importance of Alison's contribution to poetic theory as being that,

> he restored to poets a symbolic language. The new language was a system of common symbolism, however, in a very different manner from the old. The new symbols have no objective, agreed upon significance ... Yet they are a language. That symbols are subjective does not make them irresponsibly personal, with the poet speaking a language intelligible only to himself. Alison showed that a large common ground of emotional association exists - he assumed among all mankind, but at least among people of a similar culture.[2]

Tuveson regards Alison as the first herald of a symbolist aesthetic and compares him to Yeats on that basis, concurring thereby with Arthur Symons when he called Yeats 'the chief representative of [the symbolist] movement in our country'.[3] The relationship, however, can be seen not only as that between a precursor and a completed achievement: Alison's crypto-symbolism is not merely interesting because it prefigures one of the major

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1 Archibald Alison, Essays on the Nature and Principles of Taste (Edinburgh: Bell and Bradfute, 1790).

2 Ernest Lee Tuveson, The Imagination as a Means of Grace (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1960), p. 190.

3 Arthur Symons, The Symbolist Movement in Literature (New York: Dutton, 1958), p. xix.

theories of a later period, it is interesting because it reveals elements which still exist in that later theory and which are obscured by our concentration on that which leads towards our own day and our own interests and theories. Yeats's mysticism and his espousal of Blake's arguments against Locke obscure for us the extent to which Yeats's own theories have the same empiricist and associationist bases that Alison's have.

Alison's theory of art is rigorously psychologistic and his essays represent an attempt to study empirically the nature of the psychological processes which accompany the experience of any aesthetic object. The structure of the process is that of the mind's ability to associate any given datum with others, though Alison does not go so far as Hume and suggest that this is the only basis of the mind's operations. What he does insist upon is universality of the associative process, the fact that aesthetic experience has the same basis in all men. The point is made at the outset of the essays:

> When any object, either of sublimity or beauty, is presented to the mind, I believe every man is conscious of a train of thought being immediately awakened in his imagination, analogous to the character or expression of the original object. The simple perception of the object, we frequently find, is insufficient to excite these emotions, unless it is accompanied with this operation of the mind, unless, according to common expression, our imagination is seized, and our fancy busied in pursuit of all those trains of thought, which are allied to this character or expression.[1]

'Common experience' is the test of truth and the truth discovered is that the power of an aesthetic object is the power of invoking an extended 'train of thought'. Yeats describes the same process in his essay 'The Symbolism of Poetry' in his discussion of the words 'white' and 'purple' as they might occur in a line of poetry: 'innumerable meanings, which are

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1 Alison, Essays, p. 2.

held to 'white' or 'purple' by bonds of subtle suggestion, and alike in the emotions and the intellect, move visibly through my mind, and move invisibly beyond the threshold of sleep, casting lights and shadows of an indefinable wisdom.'[1] Living a full century after Alison, Yeats's description is bound to involve areas of difference and the introduction of elements of the subconscious as a basis for the associative process is one of these. The same addition appears in Yeats's description of some of his earliest occult experiences in the company of MacGregor Mathers:

> I was then shown how to allow my reveries to drift, following the suggestion of the symbol. I saw a desert, and a gigantic Negro raising up his head and shoulders among great stones. There was nothing in the symbol, so far as I could judge, to have called up the result - if it was association of ideas, they were subtle and subconscious.[2]

Once the associative process is pressed into the area of the unconscious it ceases to be open to the kind of introspection that is practised by Alison, since by definition it now operates in an area of the mind to which normal consciousness has no access. Yeats has no alternative, empirical explanation, however, than to invoke the concept of association. If there is to be any explanation of the psychological phenomenon, if it is not to be accounted entirely beyond the realms of our understanding - and Yeats's occultism had always its experimental, empiricist side - there is only one model which can be invoked, the one that links Yeats to Alison.

Despite the differences between them therefore, I want to set Yeats's and Alison's theories side by side in order to reveal the continuity of thought between them and also to show the evolving implications of the

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1 Yeats, Essays and Introductions (London: Macmillan, 1961), p. 160. All references to this volume hereafter abbreviated to 'E&I'.

2 W.B. Yeats, Memoirs (London: Macmillan, 1972), p. 27.

aesthetic tradition within which they are working. Such a comparison is necessarily synchronic, at least in the first instance, and I will therefore tend to flatten out the development of Yeats's thought, treating all his writings between 1890 and 1910 as though they were contemporary, part of a single system. This is unavoidable for the time being but I will discuss later the diachronic aspect.

The essential feature of the aesthetic theory which Yeats and Alison share is the extent to which the experience of art is removed from the object itself into the mind of the perceiver: the experience is not _of_ the art object as it is in itself, but of the mind's own operations resulting from, causally emanating from the work of art. The real locus of our aesthetic experience is our own mental operations once they have separated themselves from the actual object in the world. Alison suggests that the words in a poem 'take possession of our imagination, and awaken in it such innumerable trains of imagery, as almost to leave behind the fancy of the poet',[1] and that 'the object itself, appears only to serve as a hint, to awaken the imagination, and to lead it through every analogous idea that has a place in memory.'[2] The 'real' poem is the one that our minds create for themselves in reviving from the past ideas and emotions which associate themselves with the initial stimulus. Yeats describes the same experience in his essay 'The Philosophy of Shelley's Poetry':

> Though I do not think that Shelley needed to go to Porphyry's account of the cold intoxicating cup, given to the souls in the constellation of the Cup near the constellation Cancer, for so obvious a symbol as the cup, or that he could not have found the wolf and the deer and the continual flight of his Star in his own mind, his poetry becomes the richer, the more

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1 Alison, _Essays_, p. 6.

2 Ibid., p. 42.

> emotional, and loses something of its appearance of idle fantasy when I remember that these are ancient symbols, and still come to visionaries in dreams. Because the wolf is but a more violent symbol of longing and desire than the hound, his wolf and deer remind me of the hound and deer that Oisin saw in the Gaelic poem chasing one another on the water before he saw the young man following the woman with the golden apple; and of a Galway tale that tells how Niamh, whose name means brightness or beauty, came to Oisin as a deer; and of a vision that a friend of mine saw when gazing at a dark blue curtain.[1]

The casual contingency of that dark-blue curtain leads Yeats into a description of a hermetic rite, on to Shelley's Triumph of Life and then to suggest that 'it may have been this memory, or it may have been some impulse of his nature too subtle for his mind to follow, that made Keats ...'[2] Yeats's reaction to what has been given in Shelley's poem has been to fill it out with elements of his own, significant associations thrown up by his own memory. He never, in fact, returns to Shelley's lines: the full aesthetic experience is in the lines only insofar as the lines give rise to a series of personal remembrances. Yeats's mind leaves the lines far behind in his engagement with 'every analogous idea that has a place in the memory.'

Yeats provides us with a more theoretical statement of the same effect in 'The Emotion of Multitude' and shows how the artist can encourage this movement of the mind into ever widening circles of its own creation:

> The Shakespearian drama gets the emotion of multitude out of the sub-plot which copies the main plot, much as a shadow on the wall copies one's body in firelight. We think of King Lear less as the history of one man and his sorrows than as the history of a whole evil time. Lear's shadow is in Gloucester, who also has ungrateful children, and the mind goes on imagining other shadows, shadow beyond shadow, till it has pictured the world ... Ibsen and Maeterlinck have, on the other hand, created a new form, for they get multitude from the wild duck in the attic, or from the crown at the bottom of the fountain, vague symbols that set the mind wandering from idea to idea, emotion to emotion.[3]

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1 Yeats, E&I, pp. 89-90.

2 Ibid., p. 91.

3 Ibid., pp. 215-6.

Given the existence of the associative context into which the work of art will be inserted in order that it can be experienced, the artist can create patterns within his work which will set up the initial steps in the observer's train of thought. The associations are, as it were, included within the work of art, at least in their preliminary formulation. The inner organisation of the work of art becomes an imitation of the processes by which it will be experienced.

To say this, of course, is to suggest that the work of art is a pragmatic construction, a piece of machinery for the evocation of particular effects rather than the organic unity which we have, at least since the Romantic movement, assumed it to be. To insist, as I am doing, on the continuity between a pre-romantic like Alison and a late romantic like Yeats implies that the realignment introduced into English literature by Wordsworth and Coleridge is not as radical, at least in some respects, as our schematic views of literary history might suggest. Frank Kermode posits a radical version of the break between eighteenth and nineteenth century aesthetic theory in terms which are a challenge to the comparison I am making:

> Whether the objects of one's hatred are Bacon, Locke and Newton, or Darwin, Huxley and Lepage, or other monsters chosen by nineteenth century Frenchmen, one is going, whenever one uses language about art, to be involved in some organicist challenge to the basic eighteenth-century mechanistic treatment of the subject. The most famous statement of this challenge in English is in Biographia Literaria, where Coleridge refutes Hartley's mechanistic psychology ... Before this there had been a prolonged effort by eighteenth century aestheticians and psychologists in the tradition of Hartley (notably Hazlitt's favourite Tucker and, to a lesser extent Alison, to whom Wordsworth listened) to develop within the Locke-Hartley tradition a certain freedom from pure determinism, without abandoning that uniformity of impulse which made the imagination as much as the memory dependent upon the nervous reorganization of sense-impressions. But however ingenious such attempts might be,

> they could never have led to an organicist theory of art, because they could only conceive of extremely complicated mechanical processes performed upon material supplied by the 'vegetative' world.[1]

As I have already partly suggested above[2] this interpretation of the development of aesthetic theory confuses two separate issues: the introduction of an organic metaphor to describe the work of art does not solve the problem of its apprehension by an observer - the primary problem to which a writer such as Alison directed his attention. The organic metaphor explains how the work of art comes to exist, explains the non-mechanistic process of the work's conception and suggests the existence of a universe whose values are not those of scientific determinism, but, with the disdain of the audience that grows constantly throughout modern art, it does not explain what happens when that work is apprehended by a reader. As Wittgenstein said with regard to why people had always assumed the sun went round the earth, what would have been different in what one saw if one assumed the earth went round the sun? Reorienting our view of the importance of the creative principle does not affect the context within which the work will be experienced. And, in any case, the concept of the creative imagination is not nearly so powerful in Yeats or in Eliot as commentators would sometimes suggest - both insist on the transcendent or subconscious creative sources of the imagination, but almost as something prior to the actual composition of a poem. The poem is a creation of craft which replaces, according to Eliot,[3] the original

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1 Frank Kermode, Romantic Image (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1961) pp. 92-3.

2 See the section on 'The Associationist Tradition'.

3 'There is first, [Herr Benn] says, an inert embryo or "creative germ" ... and, on the other hand, the Language, the resources of the words at the poet's command. He has something germinating in him for which he must find words; but he cannot know what words he wants until he has found the words ... When you have the words for it, the "thing" for which the words had to be found has disappeared.' "The Three Voices of Poetry" in On Poetry and Poets (London: Faber, 1971), pp. 97-8.

emotional unity, and the insistence on craft is there too in Yeats, as in this description of the state of Irish poetry: 'But side by side with this robustness and rough energy of ours there goes the most utter indifference to art, the most dire carelessness ... Yet he who would write a memorable song must needs be ready to give often days to a few lines.'[1] Yeats's use of the word 'art' here has no overtones of the organic. The art is the mechanical art of working with words, a work which takes time, which is not the sudden and sustained growth of seed into blossom. Yeats makes the same point in another essay in terms of a national comparison:

> A young man in England of literary ambition is usually busy with details of rhythm, the advantage of opposing methods and the like and is content to leave problems of government to the journalist and questions of fate, free will, foreknowledge absolute to the professors and the devil. In Ireland we go to the other extreme and our literature has sprung generally from some movement in public affairs.[2]

The implication, of course, is that the Irish poets - and presumably Yeats is thinking primarily of those of the Young Ireland movement - have paid too little attention to the details of craft, depending on their subject matter to produce an effect in the reader.

The mechanistic element in Yeats should not be obscured for us by his use of a vocabulary which is sometimes vitalistic, sometimes occult. The latter are, very often, used for the poetic purpose of invoking the kind of associative processes which they are intended to describe or to replace. For instance, in 'The Symbolism of Poetry' Yeats gives the following account of the associative process:

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1 John P. Frayne, Uncollected Prose by W.B. Yeats, Vol. 1 (London: Macmillan, 1970), p. 249. Hereafter cited as Frayne I. Uncollected Prose by W.B. Yeats, Vol. II, ed. John P. Frayne and Colton Johnson (London: Macmillan, 1975) will be cited as Frayne II.

2 Frayne I, p. 336.

> All sounds, all colours, all forms, either because of their pre-ordained energies or because of long association, evoke indefinable and yet precise emotions, or, as I prefer to think, call down among us certain disembodied powers, whose footsteps over our hearts we call emotions.[1]

The language here is a language which invokes the associative process in order to illustrate it and describe it. The transcendentalism - of which I will have more to say later - does not deny the particular mechanical process by which the mind comes to apprehend the transcendent, nor the mechanical process by which it will be instantiated in a work of art. Yeats establishes a symbiotic relationship which, replacing psychologistic with mystic terminology, is very close to the one that Eliot posits as existing between craft and inspiration. In discussing Shelley he makes the mutual dependence of craft and transcendental inspiration clear:

> The passage where Queen Mab awakes 'all knowledge of the past', and the good and evil 'events of old and wondrous times', was no more doubtless than part of the machinery of the poem, but all the machineries of art are parts of the convictions of antiquity, and readily become again convictions in minds that brood over them with visionary intensity.[2]

As always Yeats picks on a passage which both illustrates his point and, in its own nature, seems a reflection of it, because what Queen Mab does in awakening 'all knowledge of the past' is, in fact, what the poem is doing to the reader who broods on it, wakening the memories and associations which will transform the mere machinery into a luminous revelation of reality. The 'visionary intensity' with which the mind broods on the work of art in Yeats's conception has its more prosaic equivalent in Alison's discussion of the differences in our reaction to the same or similar stimuli at different times:

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1 Yeats, E&I, pp. 156-157.

2 Yeats, E&I, p. 74.

> That state of mind, every man must have felt, is most favourable to the emotions of taste, in which the imagination is free and unembarrassed, or, in which the attention is so little occupied by any private or particular object of thought, as to leave us open to all the impressions, which the objects that are before us, can create. It is upon the vacant and unemployed, accordingly, that the objects of taste make the strongest impression.[1]

Alison, of course, has none of Yeats's visionary leanings, but what is significant is that they both emphasise within their aesthetic the role played by the receptive consciousness in the creation of the experience. It is not ever a simple matter: the mind must be in a particular state and in both cases that state is one in which the personal concerns of the observer are suspended, either by visionary intensity or by idleness. In either state, though, the mind is free to develop its own inner pattern in response to the stimuli provided - mechanically - by the work of art.

The concentration on the state of mind of the recipient of the art work may be a temperamental proclivity which Yeats and Alison share, but it seems to me to arise out of a deep awareness of problems which are inherent in the idea of communication in poetry when the essence of all art is assumed to be the setting loose of associations in another mind. The associationist concept of language was common to all theorists of the nineteenth century and, though it explained how we come to use words and relate them to specific objects or states in the world, it could not easily account for the shared experiences of speakers of the same language. Where language, as in poetry, is specifically directed to evoking a host of associations connected with a word, rather than merely the object itself with which the word is linked by convention, the problem of communication becomes severe.

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1 Alison, Essays, p. 6.

Alison is impelled by the difficulty in knowing whether one's audience will react with appropriate - or indeed any - associations to offer the following advice:

> In all those Arts, therefore, that respect the Beauty of Form, it ought to be the unceasing study of the Artist, to disengage his mind from the accidental Associations of his age, as well as the common prejudices of his Art; to labour to distinguish his productions by that pure and permanent expression, which may be felt in every age; and to disdain to borrow a transitory fame, by yielding to temporary caprices of his time...[1]

The artist must seek only those subjects which are certain to be able to induce an associative response in any age, subjects which are fitted to the universal nature of the human mind. Alison is, of course, working within a scheme whose essential values are still neo-classic and his conception of the universal is moulded by it, but Yeats too is insistent on the need to concentrate on that which will not be vitiated by the accidental associations of the age: 'The end of all art is the ecstasy awakened by the presence before an ever changing mind of what is permanent in the world.'[2] The unchanging object which is the work of art must have lineaments which will be appropriate to the creation of associations and changing patterns of association in minds whose contents are never fixed. The constantly changing trains of thought and images must be sparked off by the work of art and it can only hope to achieve that if it depicts, if it takes as subject matter, something which is universal in the experience of mankind. Yeats divides poets into two classes on the basis of such distinctions:

> Poets may be divided roughly into two classes. First those who - like Coleridge, Shelley, Wordsworth - investigate what is obscure in emotion, and appeal to what is abnormal in man,

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1 Alison, Essays, p. 397.

2 Yeats, E&I, p. 287.

> or become healers of some particular disease of the spirit. And second, the bardic class - the Homers and Hugos, the Burnses and Scotts - who sing the universal emotions, our loves and hates, our delight in stories and heroes, our delight in things beautiful and gallant. They do not write for a clique or leave after them a school, for they sing of all men.[1]

Yeats's distinction is based on the difference between those poets who gain their associative response by providing something strikingly unusual, by examining the eccentricities of a character's mental processes, and those whose effect is achieved by appealing to the common ground of experience which we all share. One senses, perhaps, in such a passage Yeats's desire to link the art of the first with the potentialities of the second; his own experience of the cliques in London in the 'nineties with the broad based, inclusive culture of the Irish nationalists.

Despite the call for universality, however, Alison insists, as indeed the theory logically requires, that the most moving scenes and descriptions and events will be those which touch us personally:

> There is no man, who has not some interesting associations with particular scenes, or airs, or books, and who does not feel their beauty or sublimity enhanced to him, by such connections. The view of the house where one was born, of the school where one was educated, and where the gay years of infancy were passed, is indifferent to no man. They recall so many images of past happiness and past affections, they are connected with so many strong or valued emotions, and lead altogether to so long a train of feelings and recollections, that there is hardly any scene which one ever beholds with so much rapture.[2]

The same effect, Alison believes, can be discerned at a more general level:

> The scenes which have been distinguished by the residence of any person, whose memory we admire, produce a similar effect ... The scenes themselves may be little beautiful; but the delight with which we recollect the traces of their lives, blends itself insensibly with the emotions which the scenery itself, excites; and the admiration which these recollections

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1 Yeats, 'The Poetry of Sir Samuel Ferguson', II, Frayne 1, p. 105.

2 Alison, Essays, p. 15.

> afford, seems to give a kind of sanctity to the place where they dwelt, and converts everything into beauty which appears to have been connected with them. There are scenes, undoubtedly, more beautiful than Runnymede, yet to those who recollect the great event which passed there, there is no scene, perhaps, which so strongly seizes upon the imagination ...[1]

Alison's descriptions are such an apt presentation of the essential structure of so many of Yeats's poems - 'The Wild Swans at Coole', 'In Memory of Major Robert Gregory', 'Byzantium', 'Coole Park and Ballylee' - that one might imagine them written to order - or even that Yeats had read Alison, which, as far as I am aware, he had not. Anything which appeals to the most vivid areas of memory will provoke powerful associational response since memory is the very basis of association. It follows therefore that anything which has no direct place in the memory will be capable of little aesthetic impact. Alison is sufficiently rigorous to allow that this will be a necessary detraction from some aspects of classical art: 'The fine lines which Virgil has dedicated in his Georgics, to the praises of his native country, however, beautiful to us, were yet undoubtedly read with a far superior emotion by an ancient Roman.'[2] Yeats bases his hopes for an Irish literary revival upon the artist's ability to tap exactly that common area of emotion and sentiment as the source of aesthetic response. Discussing the project for an Irish literary theatre Yeats wrote,

> We believe, too, that the people who read books and have ceased to go to the theatre will find out about us gradually, as they have found out about similar attempts in other countries, and will come to see our plays, and will even stay a little longer in town for their sake. There is no feeling, except religious feeling, which moves masses of men so powerfully as national feeling, and upon this, more widely spread among all classes in Ireland today than at any time this century, we

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1 Alison, Essays, p. 16.

2 Alison, Essays, p. 23.

> build our principal hopes. It will give us just that help which men of letters have lacked for similar attempts elsewhere.[1]

The power of national associations are ones that Yeats and Alison both believe can be exploited effectively by the artist where people share a sense of belonging to a particular culture.

The national context does not, however, necessarily impose upon the writer a 'nationalistic' subject: the nationalism is a function of appealing to those aspects of consciousness which are common to many men's actual experience of the world. It is the fact of a previous direct experience which gives the association its peculiar power, but it has to be an experience with which many can form their own associations. Thus writing of the Irish poet Mangan, Yeats is able to make the following allowance for his limitations:

> Unlike most poets his childhood was not spent among woods and fields with Nature's peace and ancient happiness. He had no early dream - no treasure house of innocent recollection: his birth-place sooty Fishamble Street, his father a grocer ...[2]

The fact that Mangan has no recollections to bring to bear in his creative work, recollections which will establish a common bond with his audience, weakens his power as a poet: Mangan's associative frame of reference is an inappropriate one for a poet. But the poet lives in a dialectical relationship with his environment because it is partly through literature that the environment comes to have associative significance for him: 'All these stories are such as to unite man more closely with the woods and hills

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1 Yeats, Frayne II, p. 140, 'The Irish Literary Theatre', Dublin Daily Express, Jan. 14, 1899.

2 Yeats, Frayne I, p. 115, 'Irish Poets and Authors', Irish Fireside, March 12, 1887.

and waters about him, and to the birds and animals that live in them, and to give him types and symbols for those feelings and passions which find no adequate expression in common life.'[1] The elements of our common landscape develop meaning for us through the associations which literature provides and, since it is based on a local landscape and a national culture, all literature must have a national basis: 'There is no nationality without literature, no literature without nationality.'[2]

The dialectical process of art's relationship with nature is one which Yeats and Alison both tend to see in quantitative terms. It is not that literature changes the quality of our perception of the world around us, but provides a far greater storehouse of memories from which we can draw in order to increase, literally, the quantity of our associations. The art we experience does not, as Wilde suggested in his dictum that life imitates art, change what we see, but increases its suggestiveness to us. Alison exemplifies this fact in relation to the Greek and Gothic myths:

> the time when nature began to appear ... in another view than as something useful to human life, was, when [we] were engaged in the study of classical literature ... The beautiful forms of ancient mythology with which the fancy of the poets peopled every element, are now ready to appear in [our] minds upon the prospect of every scene. In most men, at least, the first appearance of poetical imagination is at school, when their imaginations begin to be warmed by the descriptions of ancient poetry, and when they have acquired a new sense, as it were, with which they can behold the face of nature.[3]

Yeats describes a personal experience of the same order in 'The Symbolism of Poetry':

> If I watch a rushy pool in the moonlight, my emotion at its beauty is mixed with memories of the man that I have seen

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1 Yeats, Frayne I, p. 287; 'A Literary Causerie', Speaker, August 19 1893.

2 Frayne I, p. 224, United Ireland, May 14, 1892.

3 Alison, Essays, p. 45.

> ploughing by its margin, or of the lovers I saw there a night ago; but if I look at the moon herself and remember any of her ancient names and meanings, I move among divine people, and things that have shaken off our mortality, the tower of ivory, the queen of waters, the shining stag among enchanted woods, the white hare sitting upon the hilltop, the fool of Faery with his shining cup full of dreams ...[1]

For both reminiscence of literary and mythological material represents an increase in the mind's train of association at any given prospect and so an increase in the aesthetic experience involved. Yeats even makes of the very vagueness of this process an escape from the isolated condition in which the artist creates: 'It is only by ancient symbols, by symbols that have numberless meanings besides the one or two the writer lays emphasis on, or the half-score he knows of, that any highly subjective art can escape from the barrenness and shallowness of a too conscious arrangement, into the abundance and depth of Nature.'[2] The privacy of subjectivity achieves a public world by using symbols whose meanings are 'numberless': it is the quantitative potential that makes communication certain.

In general, however, both Yeats and Alison insist on a more specific delimitation of the associative context, one that is based, for both of them, on empirical evidence. Alison assumes that all art is directed towards an educated social group whose background will be that of a classical education and whose associative framework will therefore be that of classical culture. This is held to be empirically true on two levels, as so often with eighteenth century theorists: on one level it is true because a certain social group does in fact share this educational

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1 Yeats, E&I, pp. 161-2.

2 Yeats, E&I, p. 87.

background, but this is, as it were, a contingent fact; more importantly it is true because the classical authors had laid down the forms of culture which come closest to the norm of the human mind, a fact which explains their permanent appeal. Alison, however, finds himself struggling between these two different explanations of the associative process, and it is precisely this struggle which makes him such an interesting exemplar of the aesthetic situation on the eve of the Romantic movement. For Yeats, with his lack of classical culture, there is a different problem: the associative context ought to be the one belonging to the national culture into which one is born - his problem is to bring to life a national culture which has become moribund and to escape the associations of English culture. Without a vigorous national culture there is no associative basis on which the artist can depend to achieve a communication with his audience, just as, for Alison, communication is impossible without a shared culture of education.

One of the interesting implications of this situation is that there is not only a dialectical relationship between literature and the environment, but that there is a dialectical relationship between literature and all past literature. All art is dependent on previous art for its existence and its effectiveness because it is only through that art that the perceiver, and indeed the artist himself, can create a state of mind which is suitable to the experience of new aesthetic stimuli.[1] Alison comes very close to Wilde when he describes in the following passage the transformation of banal reality in the eye of the appropriate observer:

> Even the familiar circumstances of general nature, which pass unheeded to the common eye, the cottage, the sheep-

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1 The similarity of this to Eliot's position as outlined in 'Tradition and the Individual Talent' is not, as I hope to show, accidental.

> fold, the curfew, all have expressions to them, because, in the compositions to which they have been accustomed, these are all associated with peculiar characters or rendered expressive of them; and leading them to the remembrance of such associations, enable them to behold with corresponding dispositions, the scenes which are before them, and to feel from their prospect, the same powerful influence, which the eloquence of poetry has ascribed to them.[1]

Yeats makes a very similar point in 'The Symbolism of Poetry':

> I doubt indeed if the crude circumstance of the world, which seems to create all our emotions, does more than reflect, as in multiplying mirrors, the emotions that have come to solitary men in moments of poetical contemplation.[2]

The world for both of them is a world which we see through the experiences we have previously had in art; it is only through art that the world comes to have any personal significance or meaning for us. Yeats even applies this to the very matter of poetry, the words themselves, in his criticism of Longfellow:

> No words of his borrow their beauty from those that used them before, and one can get all that there is in story and idea without seeing them as if moving before a half-faded curtain embroidered with kings and queens, their loves and battles and their days out hunting, or else with holy letters and images of so great antiquity that nobody can tell the god or goddess they would commend to an unfading memory.[3]

The 'unfading memory' is essential to both poet and reader if they are to create or experience an aesthetic object - precisely because what is 'aesthetic' is not the object, but what it provokes in the experience.

The 'truth', therefore, that literature conveys to us is a truth not about the world, but about the artist's and our own mind. Art

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1 Alison, Essays, p. 47.

2 Yeats, E&I, p. 158.

3 Yeats, 'What is Popular Poetry', E&I, p. 6.

necessarily uses our common area of experience - external nature - as the medium of this truth, but it is in no sense 'imitative'. Its presentations are always a matter of truth to inner feeling, to our reaction to external stimuli rather than attention directed towards external objects themselves. For Alison such truth involves the purification of nature, its transformation into a form that will produce a train of association of only one kind because it has removed whatever is inconsistent or dissonant in actuality. He suggests that,

> There is no man of common Taste who has not often lamented the confusion of expression which so frequently takes place, even in the most beautiful scenes of real Nature; and which prevents him from indulging to the full the peculiar emotion which the scene itself is fitted to inspire. The cheerfulness of morning is often disturbed by circumstances of minute or laborious occupation ... the tranquillity and melancholy of evening by vivacity and vulgar gaiety.[1]

The aesthetic attitude of the disinterested spectator is disturbed by less disinterested members of the community; in the world of art there can be no such intrusion: 'it is a creation of Fancy with which the artist presents us, in which only the greater expressions of Nature are retained, and where more interesting emotions are awakened, than those we experience from the usual sameness of common scenery.'[2]

The purification which Alison describes is a purification of emotion; the end of all art is an emotion continued and unified by a train of association. Yeats's theory too is emotivist, though he preferred, at least in the 1890s, the word 'mood' to 'emotion'. A mood is the 'one' that unites the 'many': it is what gives unity to the diversity of the associative process and the words, images, rhythms of a poem succeed if they resolve themselves in the reader's mind into a single mood; in

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1 Alison, Essays, p. 84

2 Alison, Essays, p. 81

Alison's terminology, a 'simple emotion': 'the only subjects that are in themselves proper for the imitation of these Arts are such as are productive of some species of Simple Emotion.'[1] Yeats says as much in a passage I have already quoted, linking associationist and emotivist terminology: 'All sounds, all colours, all forms, either because of their preordained energies or because of long association, evoke indefinable yet precise emotions.'[2] And Yeats holds this to be true not only of the elements of art but of poems themselves: 'A little lyric evokes an emotion, and this emotion gathers others about it and melts into their being in the making of some great epic.'[3]

The objects contained within works of art, or used by works of art are, therefore, subsidiary to their effects. Our interest in them is not intrinsic to their own nature but to some emotion of which they are the expression. Art is always the purification of external reality in order to make it conform to the principles of the single moods:

> It was one of the complaints against Shakespeare in his own day, that he made Sir John Falstaff out of a praiseworthy old Lollard preacher. One day as he sat over Holinshed's History of England, he persuaded himself that Richard II, with his French culture, 'his too great friendliness to his friends', his beauty of mind, and his fall before dry, repelling Bolingbroke, would be a good image for an accustomed mood of fanciful, impracticable lyricism in his own mind. The historical Richard has passed away forever the Richard of the play lives more intensely, it seems, than did ever living man. Yet Richard II, as Shakespeare made him, could never have been born before the Renaissance, before the Italian influence, or even one hour before the innumerable experiences we can never know, brought Shakespeare to the making of him. He is typical not because he ever existed,

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1 Alison, Essays, p. 90.

2 Yeats, E&I, pp. 156-7.

3 Yeats, E&I, pp. 157-8.

> but because he made us know of something in our own minds we had never known of had he never been imagined.[1]

Yeats's description of this process centres upon the mind's reflective contents rather than upon the work of art itself. Shakespeare introspects a certain emotion of his own for which he finds a suitable external expression in Richard; we, reading his play, discover in ourselves some element of our own consciousness which we were previously incapable of introspecting. Art is, as it were, an increase in our inner consciousness, of our knowledge of the workings of our own mind and the moods and associations which it contains. The historical actualities cease to be relevant in themselves, but become the more relevant by being a permanent expression of some human emotion. Yeats even senses a failure in Shakespeare because he belonged to a culture which left its historical material too intact, too little transformed by the communal imagination, to be of great use to the individual poet. In his essay 'At Stratford-on-Avon' he argues the failure of English culture to create a unified pattern - and therefore an unified emotional experience - out of its history:

> These nobles with their indifference to death and their immense energy seem at times no nearer the common stature of men than do the gods and heroes of the Greek plays. Had there been no Renaissance and no Italian influence to bring in the stories of other lands, English history would, it may be, have become as important to the English imagination as the Greek myths to the Greek imagination; and many plays by many poets would have woven it into a single story.[2]

In this, Irish culture is the Western culture which comes closest to the Greek:

> Indeed, Cuchulain, Finn, Oisin, and St. Patrick, the whole ancient world of Erin may well have been sung out of the void by the harps of the great bardic order.[3]

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1 Yeats, 'First Principles', Explorations (London: Macmillan, 1962), p. 145; hereafter cited as Ex.

2 Yeats, F&I, p. 109.

3 Frayne I, p. 164; a review of Sophie Bryant's Celtic Ireland in the Scots Observer, January 4, 1890.

We can see in these passages Yeats's conception of the dialectical movement of the imagination: the mood of the poet finds its symbol in some aspect of the world around him and expresses itself by using that aspect or object in art; the world in which the poet lives is, however, a world already made over into aesthetic significance by the literary associations which have been previously attached to objects in the world. The more associations that an object already has, the more potent it will be as a part of a work of art; thus the mythic characters of legend or characters in history already transformed by art are the most appropriate for the artist to create his best work around. Such characters have lost the meanings that are a part of the confused reality we normally experience and have been purified, transformed into the perfect image of some emotional state: 'It ought to be found [that] no composition of objects or qualities produces such emotion in which the Unity of character or of emotions is not preserved.'[1]

The unity which Alison makes a precondition of success in the arts leads to adverse criticism of any piece of poetry which does not have a single emotional tone, as, for instance, of the passage in Paradise Lost in which Milton refers to Adam's digestion.[2] What is demanded of the work of art, however, is also demanded of the mind which perceives it. Unless it too is released from all disruptive associative trains it will not be able to construct a unitary aesthetic experience. It is from such a source that the idea of a 'unified sensibility' perhaps takes its initial conception. Any lack of unity in the response of the observer is as inimical to the aesthetic experience as lack of unity in the work itself.

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1 Alison, Essays, p. 84.

2 Alison, Essays, p. 97.

Both Yeats and Alison utilise the concept of 'reverie' to describe the condition of the mind most appropriate to the creation of the unitary experience which amounts to the full appreciation of a work of art. 'Reverie' is that condition in which the mind is free of all practical purposes, when it is suspended in time and free to follow its own inner movements wherever the logic of their contents demands that it go: 'It is then, indeed, in this powerless state of reverie, when we are carried on by our own conceptions, not guiding them, that the deepest emotions of beauty and sublimity are felt.'[1] The purpose of reverie is always, as Alison here suggests, one of inward journeying,[2] of self-discovery and it is always the discovery of those memories which have, by the strength with which they have impressed themselves on our minds, become most significant in our own personality:

> ... nor when the tragic reverie is at its height do we say, 'How well that man is realised ! I should know him were I to meet him in the street,' for it is always ourselves that we see upon the stage, and should it be a tragedy of love, we renew, it may be, some loyalty of our youth, and go from the theatre with our eyes dim for an old love's sake.[3]

The aesthetic response is only possible, given such a model of its working, if the observer has sufficient personal experience of certain kinds. It is not, though, that he needs the experience in order to sympathetically identify with the experiences presented on stage, it is that those previous experiences are what he re-experiences while watching the action on stage. Aesthetic experience is always dependent, therefore, on certain kinds of personal memory.

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1 Alison, Essays, p. 42.

2 Such an experience is, I would argue, the epistemelogical foundation or context for what Harold Bloom sees as the essence of Romantic art - the internalized quest.

3 Yeats, E&I, pp. 240-1.

Since reverie is the cessation of all perception of the world which is based on the world's usefulness to us, the most intense reverie can only be the product of a life which has had the most opportunity of building up memories that are untainted by any other perceptual framework. The people who can <u>really</u> experience works of art will be those who are able to devote most of their lives to the kind of consciousness upon which reverie feeds. Alison therefore writes that,

> the man of business, who has passed his life in studying the means of accumulating wealth, and the philosopher, whose years have been employed in the investigation of causes, have both not only acquired a constitution of mind very little fitted for the indulgence of imagination, but have acquired also associations of a very different kind from those which take place when imagination is employed. In the first of these characters, the prospect of any beautiful scene would induce no other idea than that of its value. In the other, it would lead only to speculations upon the causes of the beauty that was ascribed to it.[1]

The inevitable outcome of such a position is a necessitarian relationship between the kind of life one leads and one's ability to experience aesthetically:

> ... the diversity of tastes corresponds to the diversity of occupations ... It is only in the higher stations accordingly or liberal professions of life, that we expect to find men either of delicate or comprehensive taste. The inferior stations of life, by contracting the knowledge and affections of men, within very narrow limits, produces insensibly a similar contraction in their notions of the beautiful and sublime.[2]

Art becomes the preserve of a particular social group whose way of life and whose education will foster the associative connections upon which all aesthetic experience is founded. The philistines are those without

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1 Alison, <u>Essays</u>, p. 13.

2 Alison, <u>Essays</u>, p. 62.

memory or those whose memory is full of stuff which is incapable of sustaining tbe associative train set off by a work of art. In a section called 'The Thinking of the Body' in 'Discoveries' Yeats identifies those who have, for him, perverted the course of the associative process: 'Those learned men who are a terror to children and an ignominious sight in lovers' eyes, all those butts of a traditional humour when there is something of the wisdom of peasants, are mathematicians, theologians, lawyers, men of science of various kinds.'[1] The failure of these is that the reverie which they have indulged is 'abstract' and so can bring nothing to experiences which are based on the physical, sensuous images of art. Yeats makes the point in the 1901 essay 'What is Popular Poetry' by a mockery of the artisan:

> Go down into the street and read to your baker or your candlestick maker any poem which is not 'popular poetry'. I have heard a baker, who was clever enough with his oven, deny that Tennyson could have known what he was writing when he wrote, 'Warming his five wits, the white owl in the belfry sits,' and once when I read out Omar Khayyam to one of the best of candlestick-makers, he said, 'What is the meaning of "I came like water and like wind I go?"' Or go down into the street with some thought whose bare meaning must be plain to everybody; take Ben Jonson's 'Beauty like sorrow dwelleth everywhere', and find out how utterly its enchantment depends on an association of beauty with sorrow which written tradition has from the unwritten, which had it in its turn from ancient religion.[2]

The readers of popular poetry are those who have forgotten the associations by which great poetry works; their lack of memory is a function of their divorce from tradition and without that tradition the language and images of art lose all their vibrations in mind. Real poems, as opposed to popular poems,

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1 Yeats, E&I, p. 292.

2 Yeats, E&I, p. 7.

> glimmer with thoughts and images whose 'ancestors were stout and wise,' 'anigh to Paradise' 'ere yet men knew the gift of corn.' It may be we know as little of their descent as men knew of 'the man born to be king' when they found him in that cradle marked with the red lion crest, and yet we know somewhere in the heart that they have been sung in temples, in ladies'chambers, and quiver with a recognition our nerves have been shaped to by a thousand emotions. If men did not remember or half remember impossible things, and, it may be, if the worship of sun and moon had not left a faint reverence behind it, what Aran girl would sing ...[1]

The traditional life of the folk, a life lived close to the land or the sea, is one that creates an awareness of the past, a handing on of epxerience which, as part of a communal memory, the artisans cannot have.

The social correlatives of the associationist poem I will deal with in a following chapter, but Yeats's sense of the poem as a movement back into the past, a train of associations carrying the mind back into the depths of its own forgotten experiences, is well illustrated in his identification of peasant and professional man as sharing the same kind of memory. To this memory the modern man, the middle classes of the towns, are entirely alien:

> you may persuade the half-educated country clerk or farmer's son that 'Come richest and rarest, come purest and fairest' is noble rhythm or shining poetry, but the wholly uneducated peasant of the mountains and the wholly educated professional man of the cities will have none of it, for the one has his beautiful Gaelic ballads and his tumultuous world-old legends, while the gleaming city of English literature flings wide its doors to the other.[2]

It is only possible to know good poetry, because it is only possible to experience it, if one has a tradition, if elements in any new work take up the feelings and associations which have been generated by previous works and so incorporated into the very words of the language. The poem which can only work, as the associationist poem can, by discovering in the movement of the mind a coherent train of associated memories from

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1 Yeats, E&I, pp. 8-9.

2 Frayne I, p. 334; review in the Bookman, August, 1894.

the past can only work for those whose memories have developed such a coherence. It is for this reason that Yeats lays such stress on tradition and, in 'Poetry and Tradition', identifies peasants, aristocrats and artists as the 'three types of men who have made all beautiful things'. These three groups inherit the past, they 'look backward to a long tradition, for, being without fear, they have held to whatever pleased them.'[1] The past upon which the memories of these men are based is not the accidental and contingent past of one man's experience, but the past sifted through many men's experience so that its most significant forms have been isolated, and afterwards given their own kind of unity. It is only through those memories that art can grow as rich and strange as Yeats demands that it be; a demand which is the outcome of the developing logic of the associationist tradition.

Looking back from the perspective of 1936 in his essay 'Modern Poetry', Yeats was well able to discern the implications of the kind of poetry which, in his youth, he had been writing. Describing the intentions of 'The Rhymers' Club' group he wrote:

> We tried to write like the poets of the Greek Anthology, or like Catullus, or like the Jacobean lyrists, men who wrote while poetry was still pure. We did not look forward or look outward, we left that to the prose writers; we looked back. We thought it was in the nature of poetry to look back, to resemble those Swedenborgian angels who are described as moving forever towards the dayspring of their youth.[2]

It is in the very nature of associationist poetry that it has to be backward looking, because the impact of any element is only equal to the number of associations it can resurrect from the memory. Yeats may not have realised that his poetry was associationist - the deepest layers of our

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1 Yeats, E&I, p. 251.

2 Yeats, E&I, p. 495.

epistemology are nearly always unconscious - but his critical writings are imbued with the thought of the associationist tradition and, at least later in his life, he understood its implications.

I have conducted this comparison of Yeats's thought with Alison's in order to show how the structure and implications of the aesthetic principles of associationism have not been destroyed by the shifts in taste or the shifts in metaphysic in the century which lies between their writings. There are, of course, differences in their theories, but the underlying conception of how the work of art is formed and how it is transmitted from writer to reader remains constant. As I have said, I do not think that Yeats had read Alison or would have found him sympathetic had he done so, but the link between Yeats and Alison is Hallam. In his early essays Yeats refers regularly to Hallam's essay in defence of Tennyson's poetry, 'On some characteristics of modern poetry', and suggests that it is the only piece of critical writing that compares with Shelley's 'Defence of Poetry' and Browning's essay on Shelley.[1] He describes it in another essay, a review of Lionel Johnson's poems,[2] as 'this little known and profound essay'. Yeats's interest in Hallam is based on the latter's distinction between a poetry of sensation and a poetry of reflection. The term sensation, for Hallam, covers the same ground as the idea of association, and Hallam describes the peculiar nature of the poet as one which responds with an enormous number of associations to every stimulus:

> We are therefore decidedly of the opinion that the heights and depths of art are most within the reach of those who have received from Nature the 'fearful and wonderful'

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1 Frayne I, pp. 276-78, in a review of Hallam's poetry.

2 Frayne II, p. 88; from the Bookman, February 1897.

> constitution we have described, whose poetry is a sort of magic, producing a number of impressions too multiplied, too minute, and too diversified to allow of our tracing them to their causes, because just such was the effect, even so boundless, and so bewildering, produced on their imaginations by the real appearance of Nature.[1]

The 'impressions too multiplied, too minute, and too diversified' are what constitute the essence of poetic achievement of this kind; impressions experienced by the poet and to be experienced by the reader in the face of his poetry. The associational structure of Hallam's description of the creative principle profoundly marks, I believe, Yeats's own writings on Shelley and his response to Shelley's poetry.[2] Hallam stands, as it were, midway between Yeats and Alison, because although he retains the empiricist, rationalist view of the human mind that Yeats was to reject, he offers us a type of art whose internal structure is as heterogeneous, as fluid as Alison conceived the response to art to be: not only is the recipient of the art permitted to chase his own associational responses wherever they might lead, the poet, too, is allowed to construct his poem on the basis of his own, sometimes arbitrary, associations. The problem that this immediately poses is, of course, the problem of communication: how can a reader who does not share that strange and wonderful poetic nature understand the process of association that is embodied in the poem? Hallam's answer is the traditional empiricist one: we can understand because we all share the same basic human nature:

> But, it may be asked, does not this line of argument prove too much? Does it not prove that there is a barrier between these poets and all other persons, so strong and immovable, that, as has been said of the Supreme Essence, we must be themselves before we can understand them in the least? ... We answer, this is not the import of our argument. Undoubtedly

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1 Armstrong, Victorian Scrutinies, p. 88.

2 See Frayne II, p. 34n.

> the true poet addresses himself, in all his conceptions, to the common nature of us all. Art is a lofty tree, and may shoot up beyond our grasp, but its roots are in daily life and experience. Every bosom contains the elements of those complex emotions which the artist feels, and every head can, to a certain extent, go over in itself the process of their combination, so as to understand his expressions and sympathize with his state.[1]

The common psychological structure which we all share allows each individual to glimpse the process which the poet employs in the creation of his work, but what Hallam is advocating is the importance of understanding the nature of the process rather than understanding what is actually being said within the poem. Hallam is already anticipating the kind of obscurity which was to become central in Mallarmé.

Yeats's debt to Hallam is profound and admitted, but the closer connections in time, the connections with the French symbolist school are much more problematical. Of course, Yeats shared rooms with Arthur Symons and Symons's The Symbolist Movement in Literature, although by no means rigorously associationist, does invoke associationist structures in explaining the nature of symbolist poetry and particularly in understanding the nature of the suggestiveness of symbolist art. How much of the French movement Yeats knew directly is difficult to establish, but he is the first of many British and American modernists to pay homage to the influence of Rémy de Gourmont. Yeats twice quotes de Gourmont on Villiers de L'Isle Adam,[2] but whether he knew more than this there is no telling. De Gourmont's associationist basis would certainly not have conflicted with what Yeats had learned from Hallam, though Yeats might have found his materialist and physiological basis for his associationist

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1 Armstrong, Victorian Scrutinies, p. 89.

2 Frayne II, p. 52 and p. 129.

theories less to his liking. The most important contributory source to Yeats's continued adherence to the associationist principle seems to come, however, not from any modern art theory, but from the work of Berkeley. In Berkeley Yeats would have found a conception of the mind that did not offend his anti-materialist principle. Berkeley does not often use the term association, but his conception of mental process is, nonetheless, rigorously associational:

> Ideas which are observed to be connected with other ideas come to be considered as signs, be means whereof things not actually perceived by sense are signified or suggested to the imagination, whose objects they are, and which alone perceives them. And as sounds suggest other things, so characters suggest those sounds; and, in general, all signs suggest the things signified, there being no idea which may not offer to the mind another idea which hath been frequently joined with it. In certain cases a sign may suggest its correlate as an image, in others as an effect, in others as cause. But where there is no such relation of similitude or causality, nor any necessary connexion whatsoever, two things, by their mere coexistence, or two ideas, merely by being perceived together, may suggest or signify one the other, their connexion being all the while arbitrary; for it is the connexion only, as such, that causeth this effect.[1]

For Berkeley the connections between all ideas are associational: they

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1 The Works of George Berkeley, ed. A.A. Luce (London: Nelson, 1948), Vol. 1, p. 264, from 'The Theory of Vision Vindicated', first published London 1733. For an account of the associationist aspects of Berkeley's theory see D.M. Armstrong, Berkeley's Theory of Vision (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1960), pp. 66-69. Hume acknowledges Berkeley as the source of his own associationist theory A Treatise of Human Nature, p. 17: 'A very material question has been started concerning abstract or general ideas, whether they be general or particular in the mind's conception of them. A great philosopher has disputed the receiv'd opinion in this particular, and has asserted, that all general ideas are nothing but particular ones, annexed to a certain term, which gives them a more extensive signification, and makes them recall upon occasion other individuals, which are similar to them. As I look upon this to be one of the greatest and most valuable discoveries that has been made of late years in the republic of letters, I shall here endeavour to confirm it by some arguments, which I hope will put it beyond all doubt and controversy.' The 'great philosopher' is footnoted as 'Dr. Berkeley'.

are arbitrary but natural, and whereas Locke had made association the basis of all irrational connections in the mind, Berkeley uses the irrational as a justification for his description of the normal:

> But what reason can induce us to believe the existence of bodies without the mind, from what we perceive, since the very patrons of matter do not pretend, there is any necessary connexion betwixt them and our ideas? I say, it is granted on all hands (and what happens in dreams, frenzies, and the like, puts it beyond dispute) that it is possible we might be affected with all the ideas we have now, though no bodies existed without, resembling them.[1]

Our normal patterns of experience come, in Berkeley, to have the characteristics that we usually only attribute to the process of inner refelction; our total experience is of pictures, images which pass through consciousness only partly controlled by us. What we experience even of the 'external world' is a train of thoughts, ideas which follow on, one from another, with no connections which we can control or, except philosophically, explain:

> Suppose, what no one can deny possible, an intelligence, without the help of external bodies, to be affected with the same train of sensations or ideas that you are, imprinted in the same order and with like vividness in his mind. I ask, whether that intelligence hath not all the reason to believe the existence of corporeal substances, represented by his ideas, and exciting them in his mind, that you can possibly have for believing the same thing?[2]

The train of images which we might have imagined to come from some external source and, particularly, some material source, need not do so - how then do we distinguish those which we assume to belong to 'reality', however constituted, from those which belong to our own reflections, to the activity of our own spirit? Berkeley's answer links his externality

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1 George Berkeley, A Treatise Concerning the Principles of Human Knowledge, sect. XVIII, Works, II, p. 48.

2 Ibid., sect. XX, p. 49.

with internality of the associationist thinkers:

> The ideas of sense are more strong, lively, and distinct than those of imagination; they have likewise a steadiness, order and coherence, and are not excited at random, as those which are the effects of human wills often are, but in a regular train or series, the admirable connexion whereof sufficiently testifies the wisdom and benevolence of its author.[1]

Berkeley's description of the qualities that belong to those images which are the product of reality, which come from God, is couched in exactly the terms which Alison uses to distinguish the associations created by a work of art from those created by nature: the work of art produces images in the mind which are distinct, and have an order and coherence lacking in those produced by nature. Berkeley's use of the idea of a divine author emphasises the connection between what the writer does in producing an effect in the human mind and what God does in providing us with our original sensations. Berkeley's philosophy was to give Yeats a philosophical justification for making his epistemology into an ontology, for seeing in the processes of art, as conceived on an associationist basis, the processes of the whole universe. By working backwards to something historically preceding the associationist aesthetic Yeats was able to go beyond its empiricist basis without committing himself to the vagaries of the occult. The work of art, by being that which is most coherent, most distinct, most ordered in the procession of our trains of thought and association becomes the very essence of the real; reality is only achieved by elements of the 'material' world when they are raised into the purer world of art; the artist becomes the true creator of the universe as it is in essence.

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1 Ibid., sect. XXX, p. 53.

3) Eliot and the associationist aesthetic

In his essay on F.H. Bradley Eliot chooses, as demonstrating the qualities of Bradley's style, a passage from the Principles of Logic in which Bradley is attacking the empiricist theory of the association of ideas. Idealism, of which Bradley was the foremost British exponent, if it is to be characterised in its most general historical aspect, could be described as a reaction against the atomistic view of mental events which was central to much of British philosophy in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and in castigating the failures of this tradition and its Lockean empiricism Bradley was inspired to one of his most impressive flights of philosophical rhetoric:

> 'A young child, or one of the lower animals is given on Monday a round piece of sugar, eats it and finds it sweet. On Tuesday it sees a square piece of sugar, and proceeds to eat it ... Tuesday's sensation and Monday's image are not only separate facts, which, because alike, are therefore not the same; but they differ perceptibly both in quality and environment. What is to lead the mind to take one for the other?
>
> 'Sudden at this crisis, and in pity at distress, there leaves the heaven with rapid wings a goddess Primitive Credulity. Breathing in the ear of the bewildered infant she whispers, The thing which has happened once will happen once more. Sugar was sweet, and sugar will be sweet. And Primitive Credulity is accepted forthwith as the mistress of our life. She leads our steps on the path of experience, until her fallacies, which cannot always be pleasant, at length become suspect. We wake up indignant at the kindly fraud by which the goddess so long deceived us. So she shakes her wings, and flying to the stars, where there are no philosophers, leaves us to the guidance of - I cannot think what.' [1]

This is typical of Bradley's ability to reduce another philosophical position to its most ludricous, and much of Bradley's philosophy was in a sense negative in its insistence on the fallacies committed by other

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1 T.S. Eliot, 'Francis Herbert Bradley', Selected Essays (London: Faber, third edition, 1951), p. 446. Selected Essays hereafter abbreviated to SE.

philosophers. His attacks, however, had their metaphysical foundations in the German idealist philosophy which had been made available in Britain by pioneering interpreters such as Carlyle, Stirling and Green. It was exactly this metaphysical basis in Bradley's thought, however, which the Eliot of the twenties, already almost at the point of an acceptance of Anglo-Catholicism and neo-Thomism, was most anxious to minimise. His 1927 article, for instance, which he chose to reprint in Selected Essays, insists on the fact that Bradley's philosophy is a recovery of the Greek tradition because it represents a more 'catholic and civilised and universal'[1] school. In his 1924 Criterion obituary, at a time when he was much closer to his own involvement in Bradley's philosophy but no longer, perhaps, committed to it, he is far less circumspect, insisting that Bradley's work 'is quite unaffected by the emotional obliquities which render German metaphysics monstrous'[2] and suggesting that Bradley may have become imbued with some of the atmosphere of his college and its medieval, scholastic traditions, thereby accounting for the 'sweetness and light' of his philosophy. Eliot refuses to allow Bradley to be drawn into the ambit of continental, Germanic traditions and insists: 'His philosophy is English.'[3]

In certain respects at least Eliot's statement is indisputable: the efflorescence of a systematic idealism eighty years after its continental maturity is a peculiarly English phenomenon and one which was

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1 Eliot, SE, pp. 448-449.

2 Eliot, 'Commentary', The Criterion (London: Faber, collected edition, 1967), III (October, 1924), p. 1.

3 Ibid., p. 2.

very much shaped by antagonistic native traditions.[1] In its general development and political consequences, however, it followed much the same pattern as its German original, for it began as a radical movement, a challenge, particularly by Green, to the Benthamite philosophy which, itself once radical, had come to be identified with the existing economic system; and, like Hegel's philosophy, it started from a protestant background. Green, for instance, had written to Florence Nightingale that 'something needs to be done for the educated, similar to what Wesley did for the poor.'[2] Green was the son of a protestant clergyman and his idea of his own vocation is not dissimilar - he originally intended to become a clergyman - to that of Hegel who, as Franz Gabriel Nauen points out, gained his higher education and thereby his entry into the bureaucracy and middle class Swabian life through the seminary at Tubingen:

> Holderlin, Hegel and Schelling had all attended [the seminary] and though they never became practising clergymen they never lost the sense of belonging to a spiritual elite responsible for creating for the populace a sense of identity and vocation.[3]

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1 For general studies of British Idealist philosophy see Frederick Philip Harris, The Neo-Idealist Political Theory: Its Continuity with the British Tradition (New York: King's Crown, 1944); A.J.M. Milne, The Social Philosophy of English Idealism (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1962); Melvin Richter, The Politics of Conscience: T.H. Green and his Age (London: Weidenfield and Nicholson, 1964).

2 Quoted by Richter, Politics of Conscience, p. 16.

3 Franz Gabriel Nauen, Revolution, Idealism and Human Freedom: Schelling, Holderlin and Hegel and the Crisis of Early German Idealism (The Hague, 1971), p. 4. The connection between protestant evangelism and cultural evangelism may extend to Yeats and Eliot too. Both came from families with ecclesiastical backgrounds and the displacement of religious into cultural values in the second half of the nineteenth century might account for some of the missionary zeal of their writings against the uncultured.

Hegel's philosophy was formed originally in the context of support for the French Revolution, and his later philosophy he asserted as being intended to achieve in theoretical terms what Napoleon had attempted in military terms; Green similarly affirmed that he would want to learn to use a rifle so that 'he might be able to desert to the people, if it came to such a pass.'[1] Just, however, as Hegel's philosophy became a justification of the status quo, so Green's followers by steps turned his idealism into a philosophy whose political import was, if anything, reactionary: the two principle tenets of Green's idealism, that reality is spiritual and that it is systematic, became justifications for the reality that already was, rather than pointers of the need to make human reality correspond with the general nature of the world. In the hands of Bradley Green's radical idealism becomes what Melvin Richter describes as an 'aloof conservatism'.[2]

In Bradley's hands the traditional theory of association - stemming principally from Hume - is transformed and the various categories of association are reduced to a single mode which Bradley describes as Redintegration:

> I will come at once to Redintegration, or what is more familiar to us as Association by Contiguity. Here we are forced to affirm that what happens now in the soul happens because of something else which took place there before. And it happens, further, because of a point of identity connecting the present with the past. That is to say the past conjunction in the soul has become a law of its being. It actually exists there again because it happened there once, and because, in the present and the past, an element of content is identical. And thus in the soul we can have habits, while habits that are but physical exist, perhaps, only through a doubtful metaphor.[3]

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1 Richter, Politics of Conscience, p. 76.

2 Ibid., p. 37.

3 F.H. Bradley, Appearance and Reality (London: Swan Sonnenschein, second edition, 1908), p. 355.

The habits of association which empiricist philosophy had turned into metaphysical necessities have been transferred from elements in human behaviour to the level of spiritual existence and there retain some of their former validity. What Bradley has done is to deny the atomistic causality of the relationship between mental phenomena. It is not the impact of molecular particles of ideas conceived as existing bodies in motion which creates associations, but certain elements recognised as identical between two experiences. There are not physical (or spiritual) atoms of experience which collide in the mind and force into prominence other similar particles, rather the mind actively recognises elements in common between the two experiences, and subsequently conjoins them habitually because of this perceived common element. Bradley insists that this common element is a universal, something which we do not treat as an object in itself, but as a symbol. The common element in the two experiences symbolises something beyond itself, and, therefore, it is not two similar existences which appear in the mind, but something in the nature of a word that we read as referring to different objects but having a consistent meaning. The associated experiences are linked through a common meaning perceived by the mind, but once these meanings are established they are as habitual and as permanent as any empiricist account of particles and atoms of consciousness. This is necessarily so because without it we would not be able to have any sense of continuity in our own existence: it is exactly the reappearance in the present of elements of the past connected on this basis of redintegration which creates our sense of identity, of our being a soul: 'the soul is itself its own law, consists itself in the identity between its present and its past.'[1] Thus each individual mind is individual exactly to the extent

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1 Ibid., p. 355.

that it operates on laws which are a product of accumulating experience; past and present exist in a constantly developing dialectic within which new experiences are undergone and understood through recalled complexes from the past, but those recalled complexes are themselves transformed through their participation in the present. The recalled elements are purified in order that their universal elements can be sieved out: it is the meaning of the past experience that we are in search of in order to highlight the present experience, not just the recall of the past experience in toto:

> A true connection in the end, we see cannot be true, because once upon a time its elements happened together. Mere associations, themselves always universal from the first, are hence by thought deliberately purified. Starting from 'mere facts' from those relations which are perceived in confused union with an irrelevant context, thought endeavours to transform them.[1]

The purification of the experience through time allows the essential structure of it, its basic meaning to the soul, to be perceived and set to work in the present.

These purified relations remain, however, internal to the individual soul. The universals do not necessarily correspond to the real nature of the totality of all experience, reality being that condition in which,

> nothing stands by itself, where ... nothing is forced to stand in relation with what is foreign, but, where, on the contrary, truth consists of absolute relativity.[2]

The fact that certain experiences have relationships, within the soul, with other experiences is not sufficient to establish the reality of the connection, since those relations, because perhaps only accidental, may prevent the realisation of other more universal relations which will lead

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1 Ibid., p. 356.

2 Ibid., p. 357.

to the totality which Bradley describes as the Absolute, that state in which no individual thing goes unrelated to everything else. In one sense it is the purpose of philosophy to uncover the relations which are most appropriate to the development of the universal spirit. As in Hegel, it is through philosophy becoming conscious of its destiny that the Absolute will be achieved. Thus some individual associations are more accurate than others because they conform within a system which more adequately represents this total relatedness.

It is not to be thought, however, that these experiences are seen as abstractions, though the system itself is extremely abstract. Bradley envisages all experience as containing an emotional element: even the most abstract idea occurs in a context which is emotionally charged, but it is only through universals within that context that the associative process can occur. For Bradley, association does not take place between isolated, atomistic units - the associations are based upon universals - but do involve the totalities within which those universals have occurred. In other words, any associational experience recalls not just a single element of some previous experience but the whole context within which that individual element occurred. Bradley's presentation of this aspect of his theory leans heavily on Sir William Hamilton's original discussion (and naming) of the idea of redintegration:

> Those thoughts suggest each other which had previously constituted parts of the same entire or total act of cognition. Now to the same entire or total act belong, as integral and constituent parts, in the first place, thoughts which arose at the same time or in immediate consecution; and in the second, those thoughts which are bound up into one by their mutual affinity.[1]

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1 Sir William Hamilton, Lectures on Metaphysics and Logic, ed. Mansel and Veitch (Edinburgh: Blackwood, 1859), II, p. 237.

Bradley accepts Hamilton's principle under which it is a previous totality of thought or experience, and not a single element, which is recalled, but makes this operate in two directions. He points out that anything which one recalls, by being recalled, has its existence in a present totality as well as recalling a past one and this present context must enforce a modification of any apprehension of it, even though that apprehension is directed towards the past. Metaphorically, he suggests that the universal which allows the recall to take place has 'a particular clothing, but this clothing is determined by present mental circumstances, and will not be the clothing of its past experience.'[1] The experience recalled is always subject to some measure of transformation enforced by the conditions of its recall and the totality within which the universal which makes the recall possible has occurred in the present.

This is a point to which Eliot devoted some attention in his thesis and it is not irrelevant to the nature of his critical theories and poetic practice. He wrote:

> What we attend to in perception is one group of objects: what we attend to in memory is a different group; not, as in perception, the object as in itself it really is, but its image. Not that there are two distinct entities, the object and its image - the difference is not one of physical objects, but of intended objects. In perception we intend the object; in recollection we intend a complex which is composed of image and feeling. We do not intend to remember simply the object, but the object as we remember it. And this new object is much more the experience than the past object, for we try to remember how we felt toward the past object.[2]

The past experience returns, therefore, as part of a new experience into which our feeling about the past experience is incorporated as well as the

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1 Bradley, Appearance and Reality, p. 307.

2 T.S. Eliot, Knowledge and Experience in the Philosophy of F.H. Bradley (London: Faber, 1964), p. 49; hereafter cited as K&E.

feelings contingent upon our present situation. The present totality of experience, therefore, never does give us 'the object as it really is', though that is what we intend, because the totality always includes both our present feelings that result from the object and remembered feelings from past experience which 'attach' to it because of the laws of our particular soul.

These totalities of experience are like Mill's fusion of elements; instead of the prevalent image of the mechanistic psychologists - the chain - Eliot has provided one in which layers of impressions co-exist: instead of a process extended in time we are presented with an instantaneous experience which incorporates elements past and present, a single gestalt which is neither quite the object as perceived in the past nor the object as it might be in present if one could see it as it is 'in itself'. As soon as the redintegrative process begins to work - and it is central to our sense of being individuals at all - the objects of past and present are mutually transformed into a new whole which incorporates and modifies both.

This theory, as has probably been implicit in my description of it, played a vital part in the development both of Eliot's critical theory and of his poetry. The interconnectedness of past and present, the constant reconstruction of new wholes of experience which transform the objects of experience in the past and the present, is the crucial structure that Eliot discerns in literary tradition in 'Tradition and the Individual Talent':

> ... what happens happens when a new work of art is created is something that happens simultaneously to all the works

> of art which preceded it. The existing monuments form an ideal order among themselves, which is modified by the introduction of the new (the really new) work of art among them. The existing order is complete before the new work arrives; for order to persist after the supervention of novelty, the whole existing order must be, if ever so slightly, altered; and so the relations, proportions, values of each work of art towards the whole are readjusted; and this is conformity between the old and the new.[1]

Eliot is applying here Bradley's description of the soul's workings, its establishment of continuity between past and present through the redintegrative process, to history as a whole. He is treating culture as though it were a single mind, an analogy which, of course, he makes explicit in the idea that the poet must be aware of 'the mind of Europe - the mind of his own country - a mind which he learns in time to be more important than his own private mind'.[2] Its importance lies exactly in its relations being more total, more 'real', more coherent than the accidental connections in his own private mind. It corresponds more closely with the Absolute than his individual perceptions can do.

The problem, of course, is how the poet builds this awareness into the fabric of his own creations. Eliot's answer, at least in part, lies in his deliberate use of allusion, whose justification, I want to argue, lies in the redintegrative process. The internal recall of elements of the 'mind of Europe' functions as an associative connection which does not merely draw the original line or lines to mind, but must draw with them the totality of one's literary experience by which they are placed and in which they have a meaning. Each allusion necessitates an awareness of a total ordering process in the reader's recall of it, an

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1 Eliot, SE, p. 15.

2 Eliot, SE, p. 16.

ordering process which affects the present as well as the past since the present experience of the whole poem in which the allusion occurs has also to take its place in the totality on which the allusion draws. On the personal level, however, the line must also recall some original experience of it: we remember not just the line 'but a complex which is composed of image and feeling'. That personal element of memory, our knowledge of how the quotation affected us in an earlier instance, becomes significant through being part of the total order which we have given to our experiences both literary and personal. The individual allusion, therefore, should suggest a total conception, 'the mind of Europe'. If this seems too extensive a possibility, consider a much later expression of the same thought in relation to a single word in Eliot's essay 'The Music of Poetry':

> The music of a word is, so to speak, at a point of intersection: it arises from its relation first to the words immediately preceding and following it, and indefinitely to the rest of its context; and from another relation, that of its immediate meaning in that context to all the other meanings which it has had in other contexts, to its greater or less wealth of association. Not all words, obviously, are equally rich and well-connected: it is part of the business of the poet to dispose the richer among the poorer, at the right points, and we cannot afford to load a poem too heavily with the former - for it is only at certain moments that a word can be made, to insinuate the whole history of a language and a civilization.[1]

By the use of association a word expresses a whole civilization: the appropriate placing of a word and the appropriate use of allusion are parallel modes of using the associative faculty to connect the present, the poem being read, with the totality of the past from which it emerges and which, if it is successful, it momentarily completes. Internally, the poem is made to establish the kind of connection with the past which

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1 T.S. Eliot, On Poetry and Poets (London: Faber, 1957), p. 32. Hereafter cited as OPAP.

the successful poem is held to achieve externally in the critic's perception of history.

At the time that he wrote his first poems, however, Eliot could only have been marginally aware of these theories and the early poems depend upon a more primitive conception of associationism which re-emerges at various points in Eliot's later writings as he moves further away from contact with Bradley's philosophy. In 'The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock' for instance, what we have is something that might almost pass for a poem such as Hallam described: in reading the poem we have, as it were, to get ourselves to the same starting point as the speaker so that we can see the associative process by which his thoughts are governed and connected. Thus what is disorder for the reader until he achieves the appropriate perspective is order for the speaker whose thoughts consist of his normal pattern of associative connections. What Eliot has done, however, is to make such an order impossible. His poetry operates by creating disjunctions in our normal patterns of association, disjunctions so radical as not to be able to be harmonised and thus permanentaly maintaining their associative power as the reader's mind attempts to find connections which will, in fact, never be sufficient. Prufrock's consciousness is one that works in the way that poetry works - it is identical not with an imitated human being but with the poetic technique by which it is manifested. Prufrock's inability to come to terms with the world in which he lives reveals the extent to which the poetic technique Eliot employs is itself always at odds with the world: it cannot engage with the world because it needs, for its completion, the mind of a reader - and the reader's associations - whose identity is unknown. Without knowing those associations the poem cannot know itself, because it cannot know its own completed

structure. Prufrock mirrors this in his inability to know himself, to have a substantial identity with which to engage the world: his mind is constantly completing his identity in the thought of others, but is unable to know if his hypothetical completions are true or not. As a character Prufrock suffers from the angst of the kind of poetry by which he is presented, for behind his various postures, as behind the images in which they are conveyed, is a vacuum which needs to be filled out of the reader's associations but never can be adequately filled:

> Shall I say, I have gone at dusk through narrow streets
> And watched the smoke that rises from the pipes
> Of lonely men in shirt sleeves, leaning out of windows? ...
>
> I should have been a pair of ragged claws
> Scuttling across the floors of silent seas.[1]

The functional relationship between these two images in the poem is one that operates by creating contradictory poles of associative connection: in trying to harmonise them we experience their dissonance. As psychological representations of Prufrock, however, they represent the products of a personal chain of association in which the intermediate stages have disappeared. Does Prufrock feel himself to be small and vulnerable on the street, being stared at from above by the apparently self-possessed member of an inferior class, and want to disappear beneath the sea and yet, at the same time, to develop the aggressiveness which he now lacks - a pair of claws? We can construct such connections, but they are not in the poem any more than the substantial identity of Prufrock is in it. The two terms exist: because they exist side by side we want to connect them, to see their relation and, if all else fails, we want to see them as the accidents of a single consciousness - Prufrock's. The genius of

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1 T.S. Eliot, 'The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock', Collected Poems 1909-1962 (London: Faber, 1963), p. 15. Hereafter cited as CP.

the poem is that it at once offers and denies us that solution - Prufrock searches for his identity as we search for the common element, the element of identity, between the two images and Prufrock performs for us on a narrative level what we are undergoing at a psychological level as he and we confront the constituents of his 'consciousness'.

In such presentations of emotion through disjunctions of imagery Eliot was, of course, anticipating much that was to be achieved by the Imagist movement in the years immediately following his writing of the poem in 1910 and 1911; or rather, Eliot was already going beyond what Imagism was to achieve. However, I want to turn briefly to imagism to establish the continuity of the associationist principle and the extent to which Eliot was also indebted to the same tradition I have been tracing in Yeats's thought. There were few who, by the end of the first decade of this century, could treat associationist ideas with the old-fashioned expectations of Yeats, but Ezra Pound was not slow to make use of the terminology in his polemic:

> The symbolists deal in 'association', that is, in a sort of allusion, almost of allegory. They degraded the symbol to the status of a word, they made it a form of metonomy. One can be grossly symbolic, for example, by using the term 'cross' to mean 'trial'. The symbolist's symbols have a fixed value, like numbers in arithmetic, like 1, 2 and 7. The imagist's images have a variable significance like the signs a, b and x in algebra.[1]

The significant fact about this passage is not Pound's denigration of the poetic method he conceives to be based on associationist principles, but the implicit definitions he gives to 'association', 'symbol', and

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1 Ezra Pound, 'Vorticism', The Fortnightly Review, September 1914, pp. 461-62; quoted in Peter Jones (ed.) Imagist Poetry (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1972), p. 21.

'image'. For Pound association is represented by the symbolist method which he believes to involve the substitution of one term - presumably a more 'poetic' one - for a less affective one. The image, on the other hand, is much more definite in its presentation - 'concrete', of course, became the cult word - but, and this is the important fact, it is much less definite in its implications. The symbol refers directly to one other thing, another word; the image, as the algebraic analogy suggests, has an infinite, or at least indefinite, number of possible substitutions: instead of standing for some other thing, the image presents itself as itself, but is the source for many more suggestions, releasing in the reader a multitude of experiences or significances. Thus Pound's 'image' is much closer to the associationist theory than his rhetoric might lead one to assume.

The image, in this sense, would be, for instance, the churchyard of Gray's 'Elegy', but the churchyard would be presented as single image without the poet's own ruminations about it; that image would inspire in each reader his own flow of thoughts and associations. Pound's chef d'oeuvre of imagist brevity - 'In a Station of the Metro' - has the same structure as the piece I quoted from 'Prufrock':

> The apparition of these faces in the crowd;
> Petals on a wet black bough.[1]

We know the process that brought these two images together from Pound's own description of the genesis of his poem, but rightly we regard that as irrelevant to the actual effect of the poem, since his personal associative experience has been excised. We are left with the first and last terms of an equation which are things in the world and the

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1 Ezra Pound, Collected Shorter Poems (London: Faber, 1968), p. 119.

disjunctive gap between them is the relation established between them by Pound's mind, a relation which, for the reader, is a void to be filled from his own experience. At the same time, any such completion of the poetic object must always be transitional, hypothetical, since part of the experience of the poem is exactly its sense of incompletion: our too ordered world has been suddenly recreated in terms of an unknown set of principles, has become random and thereby escaped the rationalism which would allow only unilateral connections between objects in the world.

Such developments flowing from the associationist conception of the mind had been implicit even in Alison's writings, in his assertion, for instance, that 'whatever increases the exercise of the Imagination, increases also the emotion of beauty or sublimity.'[1] Though Alison's belief in the necessary unity of works of art prevents him from drawing any such conclusion, it is evident that the activity of the imagination could be increased by offering it a problem, a structure which does not accord with its normal patterns of reaction - a conflict of associations to be unified rather than an already effected unity. It was this possibility which Rémy de Gourmont felt had been achieved by the symbolist poets of his own time, and it was from his interpretation of their achievement that Eliot and Pound developed many of their critical ideas: Eliot notes his indebtnedness to de Gourmont, for instance, in the Preface to the 1928 edition of The Sacred Wood.[2] De Gourmont was so impressed by

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1 Alison, Essays, p. 15.

2 T.S. Eliot, The Sacred Wood (London: Methuen, 1960; originally published 1920), p. viii; hereafter cited as SW.

the technique of surprising conjunctions of images and ideas that he developed a version of it for use in intellectual questions and used it in volumes such as La Culture des Idées and Le Chemin de Velours.[1] The central conception of these essays was that the human mind is generally bound to a particular train of thinking, or association, a set of intellectual and emotional habits which it was the job of the philosopher and the artist to break. By 'dissociating' thought from its normal patterning the barriers between the ordinary man and his world are suddenly removed in a moment of surprise, a fresh form of intellectual seeing similar to the poetic form advocated by the Imagists.

De Gourmont's influence on Eliot is evidenced in his adoption of the importance of new combinations of ideas to create surprise as one of his general canons of aesthetic excellence - as, for instance, in his essay on Massinger:

> These lines of Tourneur and of Middleton exhibit that perpetual slight alteration of language, words perpetually juxtaposed in new and sudden combinations ... which evidences a very high development of the senses ...[2]

- but also by the creative use which he made of De Gourmont's term 'dissociation'. In the early essay 'Imperfect Critics' Eliot holds it as a failure in Charles Whibley that, 'He has no dissociative faculty', a faculty apparently involving the ability 'to separate himself suddenly'[3]

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1 Remy de Gourmont, La Culture des Idées (Paris, 1900), Le Chemin de Velours (Paris, 1902). For an extended discussion of Eliot's indebtedness to de Gourmont see, T.R. Rees, 'Eliot, Rémy de Gourmont and dissociation of sensibility' in W.F. McNeir (ed.), Studies in Comparative Literature (Baton Rouge, 1962); for more extended treatment of de Gourmont's ideas see Eugène Bencze, La Doctrine Esthétique de Rémy de Gourmont (Paris, 1928); Garnet Rees, Rémy de Gourmont, Essai de biographie intellectuelle (Paris, 1939).

2 Eliot, 'Philip Massinger', SE, p. 209.

3 Eliot, SW, p. 37.

from the work and its general ethos. Dissociation in this case involves movements of the mind between two different contexts, but in 'Seneca in Elizabethan Translation' Eliot uses the word in a somewhat different sense, though again with laudatory implications:

> But this declamation is in its impulse, if not in its achievement, Senecan; and progress was made, not by rejection, but by dissociating this type of verse into products with special properties.[1]

In this sense 'dissociation' implies the creation of separate, self-contained areas of interest instead of the ability to step outside one such area and view it from another. It is the creation of these self-contained areas which is implied in the famous 'dissociation of sensibility', but it is only a dissociation in the bad sense because there is a loss of the dissociative faculty which allows sudden transitions from one to another, because writers are trapped within one of these self-contained areas of experience.

It is worth our while to look briefly at the intellectual background to de Gourmont's ideas, for they will substantiate the importance of the context within which I think Eliot's poetry has to be viewed. Although he was, early in his intellectual career, an advocate of an idealist philosophy he insisted on the primacy of the Lockean formulation that,

> Nihil in intellectu quod non prius fuerit in sensu: les sens sont la porte unique par où est entré ce qui vit dans l'esprit ...[2]

The 'very high development of the senses', of which Eliot finds evidence in the styles of Tourneur and Middleton, springs from this assertion of the primacy of the senses in any intellectual process: all our experience

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1 Eliot, SE, p. 88.

2 Rémy de Gourmont, Le Problème du Style (Paris: Mercure de France, 1902), p. 69.

comes from the senses, all our experience is sensible and 'sensibility' is the ability to experience without reducing anything to the etiolated ideas with which we conjure when solving purely intellectual problems. De Gourmont insists on the priority of sensation on the basis of British empiricist philosophy. He writes:

> La sensation est la base de tout, de la vie intellectuelle et morale aussi bien que de la vie physique. Deux cent cinquante ans après Hobbes, deux cent ans après Locke, telle a été la puissance destructive du kantisme religieux, qu'on est réduit à insister sur d'aussi élémentaires aphorismes ...[1]

De Gourmont, like Eliot, brings together two different traditions of European thought for the justification of poetic structures: the empiricist tradition of Locke and the transcendental tradition of Kant, one explains the working of art in the ordinary world, one explains its purpose and gives it a transcendental teleology.

The principal source of sense experience for de Gourmont is visual, but each visual experience and each word we use in communicating those experiences encapsulates an emotion through the construction of a chain of association:

> Les mots n'ont de sens que par le sentiment qu'ils renferment et dont on leur confère la représentation. Les propositions géométriques mêmes deviennent sentiments, a dit Pascal, en une de ces phrases prodigieuses que l'on a mis trois siècles à comprendre. Un théorème peut être émouvant et, résolu, faire battre la coeur. Il est devenu sentiment en ce sens qu'il n'est plus perçu qu'associé à un sentiment; il peut contenit un monde de désirs ...[2]

In this sense de Gourmont's theory is not altogether distant from Bradley's, since both insist on the existence of a totality which, even though its main direction may be abstract, will always contain an element of emotion.

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1 Ibid., p. 81.

2 Ibid., p. 39.

For de Gourmont emotions and ideas are based upon, and cannot escape from, their basis in sense experience and therefore the two can be linked through particular visual images:

> Une idée n'est pas une chose immatérielle, il n'y a pas de choses immatérielles; c'est une image, mais usée et des lors sans force; elle n'est utilisable qu'associé à un sentiment, que "devenue sentiment".[1]

The unified sensibility which Eliot acclaimed was de Gourmont's sensibility unified through its insistence upon sense experience: the force of any word is judged by the freshness of its association: its dissociation, in other words, from its hackneyed usage through its presentation in relation to direct visual stimuli. All of these considerations are united in de Gourmont's discussion of the metaphor in Problème du style, encapsulating some of the ideas I have been tracing in terms of the associationist tradition:

> Homère ne peut pas dire: baigné dans son sang; c'est une métaphore. Deux images, dans cette expression devenue banale, mais qui fut neuve, sont unies en une seule ... Homère est exact par impuissance à mentir; les impressions lui arrivent une à une, il les décrit à mesure, sans confusion. Flaubert, qui a une capacité de mensonge, donc une capacité d'art infinie, n'est pas exact en écrivant ... Ce qu'il nous donne, ce ne sont plus deux dessins symétriquement superposable, mais la confusion, visuellement absurde et artistiquement admirable, d'une sensation double et trouble ... Il nous est impossible de dissocier les images doubles ou triples qui naissent simultanément, a l'idée d'un fait, en nos cervaux troublés par des sensations tumultueuses; comme il était impossible à Homère d'opérer une association qui maintenant se fait toute seule et malgré nous.[2]

De Gourmont thus believes that there has been an elaboration of the kind of consciousness of which the human mind is capable, such that the simplicity of Homer's response to the world around him is not only no longer the kind of thing that writers are interested in, but is

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1 Ibid., p.45.

2 Ibid., pp. 89-90.

physiologically impossible. The human mind has developed in such a way that our response to any given stimuli will always be multifold, and the artist, influenced by this and making artistic use of it, must create images which unite things that have no self-evident logical connection - the artist can only gain his effect by going further in the direction in which consciousness is developing than his audience has so far done. The artist, as it were, is exploring the possible limits of this confusion of images which is our natural response to all given impressions:

> Let us go then, you and I,
> When the evening is spread out against the sky
> Like a patient etherised upon a table;

The image, 'visuellement absurde et artistiquement admirable', functions by the distance which it creates between its two terms and therefore the multiplicity of intermediary possibilities which it invokes, possibilities which it is in the nature of the modern mind to create for every given sensation.

What de Gourmont provided for Eliot, perhaps, was a way of talking about the processes of poetry, a terminology, which was not as obscure as that of his own philosophical background and more directly concerned with art, though avoiding the simplicity of earlier writers. In The Use of Poetry and the Use of Criticism Eliot invokes, in much the same way that Pound had done, the theory of an associationist psychology while disclaiming the unfashionable terminology:

> I suggest that what gives [the imagery] such intensity as it has in each case is its saturation - I will not say with 'associations' for I do not want to revert to Hartley - but with feelings too obscure for the authors even to know what they were.[1]

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1 T.S. Eliot, The Use of Poetry and the Use of Criticism (London: Faber, 1964; originally published 1933), p. 147. Hereafter cited as UPUC.

Eliot sees the image drawing power from the number of unrealised elements which cluster around it - his own image continues the substitution of a core principle for that of the chain extended in time - and which he calls 'feelings', but these feelings are raised by the object from a background matrix, they are not explicit in it. In other words, as Eliot attempts to avoid saying, they are there because of associations which the object generates in writer and reader. That this is so is made clear by his distinction between emotion and feeling in 'Tradition and the Individual Talent' a distinction whose terminology - and confusion - is Bradleian, but whose application is in the context of an associationist psychology:

> The experience, you will notice, the elements which enter the presence of the transforming catalyst, are of two kinds: emotions and feelings. The effect of a work of art upon the person who enjoys it is an experience different in kind from any experience not of art. It may be formed out of one emotion, or may be a combination of several; and various feelings, inhering for the writer in particular words, phrases or images, may be added to compose the final result.[1]

The transition from the 'effect of the work of art upon the person who enjoys it' to what inheres 'for the writer' in particular elements of his art is typical of Eliot's attempt to conflate the artist's creative situation with the reader's response, but the important point is that feelings are experiences which converge upon what is given on the page as an addition to the meanings of the words. The feelings are not contained by the normal dictionary definition of a word, or in its normal usage, but are subjective additions to those from the writer's own experience. They are, in effect, the feelings which are for that person associated with the words, which the words raise from the psyche over and

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1 Eliot, SE, p. 18.

above their accepted limitations. The emotion is the core, the feelings the multitudinous penumbra which gives poetic power and individuality to its expression.

Eliot does not always avoid using the terminology of Hartley in describing such experiences, for instance, in his essay on 'The Metaphysical Poets' he writes:

> But elsewhere, we find, instead of the mere explication of the content of a comparison, a development by rapid association of thought which requires considerable agility on the part of the reader.[1]

The 'association' invoked here suggests an operation of the mind which is controlled by the writer, the rapidity being a function of the high level of the development of his intellect. The use of 'rapid' points towards processes which are not merely triggered off in a mechanical fashion, but which are the product of effort on the part of the poet. On the other hand, in the same essay, Eliot can suggest a different operation of the associative principle:

> some of Donne's most successful and characteristic effects are secured by brief words and sudden contrasts:
>
> A bracelet of bright hair about the bone
>
> where the most powerful effect is produced by the sudden contrast of associations of 'bright hair' and of 'bone'. This telescoping of images and multiplied associations is characteristic of the phrase of some of the dramatists of the period ...[2]

In the former case the poet's associations had to be followed by the reader with 'considerable agility', in other words with considerable control of his own mental responses, but in the latter case the conflict of associative cores is possible only because each arises instantaneously

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1 Eliot, SE, p. 282.

2 Eliot, SE, p. 283.

in the reader, beyond any possibility of being controlled by him. The association of the first passage implies a movement between different contexts, but in both cases poet's and reader's involvement takes the same form, the reader responds as the writer has written. It is through this correlation that Eliot is able to make, in 'The Perfect Critic', his distinction between appropriate and inappropriate associative responses, the reaction of the 'ordinary emotional person' to the work of art and that of the trained intellect of the critic. The former, along with impressionistic critics, suffers from emotions which are 'the accidents of personal association',[1] whereas in the artist (who is therefore the perfect critic),

> these suggestions made by a work of art, which are merely personal, become fused with a multitude of other suggestions from multitudinous experience, and result in a new object which is no longer purely personal, because it is a work of art itself.[2]

The logic of a statement like this has to be studied carefully; one must not be deceived into thinking that the referent of the term 'work of art' is identical in each case. The work of art created by the artist is recreated as a work of art, but not as the same work of art, by the artist/critic. The perfect critic's reading of a work is a true experience of a work of art because he creates it as a work of art in a way which is impossible for the ordinary emotional person: it is not personal because it has been transformed into the impersonality of art. That impersonality, however, is not identical with the work of art per se, it does not imply the objectivity of the reading, but only another subjectivity raised to

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1 Eliot, SW, p. 7.

2 Ibid.

that level of coherence which allows any object to have a separable existence in the world.

The logical gap between images which was considered essential to the successful functioning of the poetic artifact is thus only the minimal version of the gap between poet and audience: the disjunction between images leaves a void which can only be filled out of the reader's own consciousness, while the work of art itself can only be experienced as a work of art by one who is himself sufficiently an artist to recreate it into impersonality out of his own personal feelings. It is because of the high level of the subjective in the existence of the poem in the process of communication that Eliot comes to insist so strongly on the need for exactitude, for concreteness, in what is actually given in the poem itself. His criticism of Pound in 1928 is significant:

> His eye is indeed remarkable; it is careful, comprehensive and exact; but it is rare that he has an image of the maximum concentration; an image that combines the precise and concrete with a kind of almost indefinite suggestion.[1]

It is a distinction which is perhaps made even more clearly in his comparison of Dryden with Swinburne in his essay of 1921:

> For Dryden, with all his intellect, had a commonplace mind. His powers were, we believe, wider, but no greater, than Milton's; he was confined by boundaries as impassable, though less strait. He bears a curious antithetical resemblance to Swinburne. Swinburne was also a master of words, but Swinburne's words are all suggestions and no denotation; if they suggest nothing it is because they suggest too much. Dryden's words on the other hand, are precise, they state immensely, but their suggestiveness is often nothing.[2]

In each of these descriptions Eliot is insisting on the given being as definite, as concrete as possible in order that it will be able to sustain

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1 'Isolated Superiority', The Dial, 84, January 1928, p. 6.

2 Eliot, SE, p. 19.

the maximum suggestion without becoming entirely vague. The definition of what is presented prevents the reader's response being encouraged into a vague, drifting lassitude, while at the same time the use of juxtaposed images, of shifts of context and so on allow the reader's own responses to come into play as much as he is able.

If the danger of symbolism was that it would fall into allegory or become a complex kind of crossword puzzle in which every term is in need of substitution by another in order to be understood, then the danger of the image is that it will turn into literalism, that the presentation of the object will deprive the poetry of the power to communicate emotion. The object begins to exist in the poem as the thing it is and not as an act of human participation in the universe - 'truth seen in passion' in the words of J.B. Yeats (after Wordsworth) to which Eliot gave his approval in a review in the Egoist in 1917.[1] The poet's world, filled with observed objects, becomes a clinical and sterile operating theatre for the eyes, dissected minutely but revealing no sympathy or feeling. Such an outcome - like its antithesis, the attempted suggestiveness of Morris or Swinburne whose verses in the end 'really suggest nothing'[2] - is not only a sign of poetic failure, it is also - or it is so because it is - a metaphysical failure. From both sides of his philosophical background Eliot had developed the conception of an apprehension of objects which is inalienable from emotional content. Bradley's theory of redintegration and de Gourmont's associationism both insist that no perception can exist without an emotional content, and that no recalled

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1 The Egoist, iv, 6 (July, 1917), p. 89, in a review of the letters of J.B. Yeats.

2 Eliot, 'Andrew Marvell', SE, p. 300.

element in perception does not carry its emotional charge. The object, therefore, cannot help but involve the emotions by its very presentation, but Eliot's problem is how to balance the one against the other. The object given must exist in a context which will provide such a balance, because it is only through that balance that any controllable transference of emotion can occur. If we look at the problem from the other end of the equation we can perhaps see its form more clearly: the poet does not want to communicate an object, he wants to communicate an emotion of some sort, but since all human experience comes from the senses, and primarily the visual sense, he conveys that emotion by the use of something which is appropriate to the reader's powers of visualization. He does not give the reader the emotion, but an object through which the emotion can come to exist in the reader - not the same emotion, since art emotions are different from life emotions, but one which is, as it were, parallel to it in art's alternative universe. The object has to be accurate enough to act as a secure focus for the emotion, but at the same time must be recognisably the bearer of something which is not concrete and precise - the author's emotion.

Such an object, properly developed, is, of course, the objective correlative. The theory of the objective correlative is given its first - and as yet unnamed - expression in Eliot's 'Reflections on Contemporary Poetry' in The Egoist, iv, September 1917:

> ... it is unmistakably human to attach the strongest emotions to definite tokens. Only, while with the Russian the emotion dissolves in a mass of sensational detail, and while with Wordsworth the emotion is of the object and not of human life, with certain poets the emotion is definitely human, merely seizing the object in order to express itself ... [With Donne] the feeling and the material symbol preserve exactly their proper proportions. A poet of morbidly keen sensibilities but weak will might become absorbed in the hair to the exclusion

> of the original association which made it significant; the poet of imaginative or reflective power more than emotional power would endow the hair with ghostly or moralistic meaning. Donne sees the thing as it is ...[1]

When Eliot says that 'it is unmistakably human' to make the kinds of connections he is suggesting, he is raising it to a level of universality which is not fully achieved by the Russians or Wordsworth - the universality which derives from the ontological theories of Bradley. For Eliot, if we take his Knowledge and Experience in the Philosophy of F.M. Bradley seriously, as for Bradley, there was no world apart from our perception of it and no 'we' apart from the objects we perceive: human consciousness is a construction out of its perceptions just as much as objects are constructions of an external world. Thus when he writes in 'Tradition and the Individual Talent' that he is arguing against the 'metaphysical theory of the substantial unity of the soul'[2] he is in essence defending the inevitable implication of human emotions in the 'objective' world and vice versa. Communication can only exist because there are objects which we identify as belonging to our common world; it is not that the object and the emotion are yoked together by the effort of the poet's will, but that any emotion will have sense impressions with which it is necessarily associated. Of course, Eliot uses the active idea of 'seize', but it is an activity of the 'emotion', not of the rational consciousness, and therefore involuntary, the object and the emotion thus linked are the only substantial unities of the world.

The sense, then, in which the 'objective correlative' is objective is qualified, as that word always is in Eliot's thought, by being applied

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1 Eliot, 'Reflections on Contemporary Poetry', The Egoist, iv, 8, p. 118.

2 Eliot, SE, p. 19.

to a universe in which objectivity and subjectivity are both unconscious differentiations of our sense experience. It is objective because it can be separated out from individual experience as part of our common perceptual world, but it is not divorced from the personalising implications of subjective experiences. The whole force of the objective correlative is that it is a unification of subjective experience with objective existent, but in order to be communicative it has to be able to recreate the subjective element - the penumbra of association - in the reader.

The penumbra is, of course made up of many responses; those emotions of which we are hardly aware, the feelings which attach to particular words and phrases through our previous experience of them the potentiality of words to 'linger and echo in the mind',[1] a multitude of associations deriving from the given image. But it is precisely the difficulty of this equation which leads to the obscurity of Eliot's formulation of the idea of the objective correlative in his essay on Hamlet. This passage has received such lengthy criticism - itself an index of how deeply appealing Eliot's invention is - that it would be redundant for me to rehearse once again its contradictions and ambiguities, principal among which is the move from the overall effect of the play to the appositeness of its internal

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1 Eliot, 'John Bramhall', SE, p. 362.

components,[1] from the poet's expression of emotion to his character's and the reduction of the latter to the former. At the core of the difficulty, however, is the problem of justifying the initial definition of the psychological functioning of the objective correlative that Eliot provides:

> The only way of expressing emotion in the form of art is by finding an 'objective correlative'; in other words, a set of objects, a situation, a chain of events which shall be the formula of that particular emotion: such that when the external facts, which must terminate in sensory experience, are given, the emotion is immediately evoked.[2]

What has not been established, and cannot empirically be established, is that the object will have the same emotional significance for one reader as it has for any other or that it had for the writer. Eliot's own bafflement in the face of Hamlet must be Shakespeare's in his attempt

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1 For discussions of the sources of the objective correlative and its place in Eliot's thinking see René Wellek, 'The Criticism of T.S. Eliot', Sewanee Review, 14 (Summer 1956), p. 418; Eliseo Vivas, 'The Objective Correlative of T.S. Eliot', in his Creation and Discovery (New York, 1955); Mowbray Allan, T.S. Eliot's Impersonal Theory of Poetry (Lewisburg: Bucknell, 1974), p. 80 ff; David J. DeLaura, 'Pater and Eliot: The Origin of the "Objective Correlative"', Modern Language Quarterly 26 (1965), p. 426; Pasquale di Pasquale Jr., 'Coleridge's Framework of Objectivity and Eliot's Objective Correlative', Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism, 26 (1968), p. 489; Murray Krieger, 'The Cultural Legacy of Matthew Arnold', Southern Review, n.s. 5 (1969), p. 458; Armin Paul Frank, 'T.S. Eliot's Objective Correlative and the Philosophy of F.H. Bradley', Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism, 30 (1971), p. 311. All of the major critics who have dealt with Eliot's poetry have, of course, also dealt with this elusive concept: the amount of discussion given to the idea testifies to its currency in our normal critical discourse as well as to its importance in Eliot's thought, but the lack of accord about its significance suggests that it is perhaps time to remove it from our terminology. At the risk of making my own interpretation explain everything I would suggest that its popularity lies precisely in the apparent specificity that it introduces into the necessary vagueness of the associationist model which it incorporates.

2 Eliot, 'Hamlet', SE, p. 145.

to express himself because the theory demands that the object, the train of events, when given immediately evokes the emotion which has seized on it as its correlative in the first place. In fact, much of Eliot's early criticism had been directed exactly at those whom he felt did not respond to works of art with appropriate emotions, 'the sentimental person in whom a work of art arouses all sorts of emotions which have nothing to do with the work of art.'[1] The objective correlative may adequately describe the process of creation, but it becomes unmanageable when Eliot attempts to conflate - as we have seen him do so often in these early writings - the creative effort with the response to it. That 'the only way of expressing emotion' may be thus is no recommendation of its communicative potentialities.

Part of the problem, of course, is that Eliot outlines his theory in terms of a negative instance: we are given an example of failure as the primary one in illustration of how poetry is supposed to work. The end of Eliot's essay is significant in this respect, for it demands that we 'need a great many facts in his biography'[2] in order to be able to assess the causes of the failure of Shakespeare's play, a demand which reflects on the extent to which Eliot considered background information to be a negative requirement in the understanding of art, i.e. one which is invoked only in the case of failed works or failed artists. Thus, perhaps, the desire for anonymity, the secrecy about his own life, which was so marked a feature of Eliot's character? But the fact that the theory is outlined in terms of a negative instance is in itself significant,

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1 Eliot, 'The Perfect Critic', SW. p. 7.

2 Eliot, 'Hamlet', SE, p. 146.

for it points to the extent to which Eliot has inherited and developed a particular type of poetry and his problem is to reorient the context in which the poetry is being written - initially a criticial context, later a social one - until it conforms to the essential needs of that poetry. Of course, such reorientation cannot leave the poetry untouched, the relationship is reciprocal, but at this stage in his development Eliot is interested in defending the already held ground by attacking that which might conflict with his position. The negative instance is required because the 'objective correlative' is one of a series of attempts made by Eliot to escape the circle of subjectivity within which the poet and reader have apparently become trapped in the kind of poetry to which he is committed.

It is in the context of this circle of subjectivity that the choice of Hamlet as the instance in which the objective correlative will be discussed is an interesting one. Throughout the early essays Eliot is obsessed with the possibility of misunderstanding a work of art by attaching to it one's personal emotions or, on the other side of the poetic equation, by the artist insisting on a too personal set of referents for his emotions. We are, for instance, given the following description of Yeats:

> The weakness of his prose is similar to that of his verse. The trouble is not that it is inconsistent, illogical or incoherent, but that the objects upon which it is directed are not fixed; as in the portraits of Synge and several other Irishmen we do not seem to get the men themselves before us, but the feelings of Mr. Yeats projected.[1]

Yeats transforming the world into the pattern of his own emotions is a man trapped within his own subjectivity; the world outside has been made over into the pattern of his emotions so that it is not in any

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1 Eliot, 'A Foreign Mind', review of The Cutting of an Agate by W.B. Yeats, The Athenaeum, 4653 (July 4, 1919), p. 521.

sense a world that is being encountered by the poet as real, its only reality consisting in the contingencies of the poet's own experiences. The element of evasion which Eliot feels to belong to this kind of poetry is well brought out by his description of Swinburne:

> He uses the most general word, because his emotion is never particular, never in direct line of vision, never focused; it is emotion reinforced, not by intensification but by expansion.[1]

The metaphors point towards someone backing away from any meeting with the world around him; his failure to meet the particular, to reach the point of intensification is exactly parallel to Hamlet's evasion of action:

> It is thus a feeling which he cannot understand, he cannot objectify it and it therefore remains to poison life and obstruct action. None of the possible actions can satisfy it.[2]

Hamlet cannot bring his feeling into focus on an object and therefore cannot direct his action in any practical way; for the poet poetry is his action and Swinburne evades that action by being unable to make his feelings focus on any particular object. Eliot's distaste for Hamlet is his distaste for a poetry of evasion which had always taken Hamlet as its model of the situation of the poet in the world. As Hamlet constantly steps aside from action to meditate on his own condition so these poets step aside from objectivity: each represents a failure to confront the world and to meet the responsibilities of one's situation. Prufrock's superiority over them as he refuses the Hamlet role is his awareness that his life <u>is</u> such an evasion. It is Hamlet's character as failed poet that makes him the instance of the failure of the 'objective

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1 Eliot, 'Swinburne as Poet', <u>SE</u>, p. 323.

2 Eliot, 'Hamlet', <u>SE</u>, p. 145.

correlative' rather than the failure of the play as a whole: Hamlet's failure to act is made equivalent to Shakespeare's failure to express, so that, perhaps, Eliot's own successful expressions will, by a parallel inversion, be equivalent to actions and therefore allow him to escape from the passivity which threatened him.

The dangers of personalising the work of art, either in the creating of it or in the experience of it, seemed to have been so intensely felt at this time by Eliot that he was willing to consider the possibility of a total divorce between art and life, an art which exists in life but which has no relations to other areas of our experience. The contention is that it is possible to create an emotion in a poem which has nothing to do with personal emotions of any kind; it would be emotion made into an object in the world, experienced by writer and reader alike as an entirely separate experience and not one feeding off their personal emotional life. The 'objective correlative' purports to explain how this is possible through the poet's concentration on the objects which are our common experience of the world, rather than concentration on one's own inner states, but the objects are not, in fact, in the poems: it is only language that is in the poem and the problem is to make that language objective too. Eliot suggests the kind of thing he approves of in 'Reflections on Contemporary Poetry', published in The Egoist in October 1917:

> M. de Bosschere is an intellectual by his obstinate refusal to adulterate his poetic emotions with human emotions. Instead of refining ordinary human emotion (and I do not mean tepid human emotion, but, however intense - in the crude living state) he aims direct at the emotions of art. He thereby limits the number of his readers, and leaves the majority groping for a clue that does not exist. The effect is sometimes an intense frigidity which I find altogether admirable.[1]

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1 Eliot, 'Reflections on Contemporary Poetry', The Egoist, iv, 9 (October 1917), p. 133.

Eliot's apparent delight in the groping confusion of 'the majority' is less in evidence, but equally implied, by the same version of this theory which appears in 'Tradition and the Individual Talent':

> The business of the poet is not to find new emotions, but to use ordinary emotions and in working them up into poetry, to express feelings which are not in actual emotions at all.[1]

By sidetracking the 'ordinary human emotions' in this way, the poet evades the possible imposition by the reader of his own emotions on the work: because there is nothing in the work which is like a human emotion, the associative principle cannot come into play on that basis. The associations are delimited by entirely aesthetic concerns; they are created by drawing the 'feelings' out of an emotion, the feelings being the suggestive potentialities contained in the language and in previous literature.

Eliot's interest in the drama seems to have sprung in part from this same desire to contextualise the associative potential of language. The suggestiveness of poetry in a dramatic context is limited by the situation in which it occurs: the associations in the language do not necessarily dissipate themselves in our own consciousness but locate themselves within the character and add to our sense of his or her depth. The problem of Hamlet, however, shows that such situational location is not sufficient in itself to provide the appropriate limits to suggestiveness. Eliot tackles the problem in 'Tradition and the Individual Talent':

> This balance of contrasted emotions is in the dramatic situation to which the speech is pertinent, but that situation alone is inadequate to it. This is, so to speak, the structural emotion, provided by the drama.

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1 Eliot, 'Tradition and the Individual Talent', SE, p. 21.

> But the whole effect, the dominant tone, is due to the fact that a number of floating feelings, having an affinity to this emotion by no means superficially evident, have combined with it to give us a new art emotion.[1]

Here we have an inverse situation to that of Hamlet: the success of the passage is dependent on the fact that the 'feelings' in the poetry are in excess of the dramatic situation. When Eliot says that these feelings are related to the emotion in a way that is 'by no means superficially evident', what he means is that there is no justification for them in the situation. They are, as it were, free-floating feelings whose association with the central emotion is almost arbitrary. Eliot is careful to avoid suggesting, however, that these feelings are anywhere but in the passage itself - but they are only in the passage itself, or behind it in the poet, if we accept the direct causal transfer of feeling from the poet to the reader. Otherwise, they are feelings in the reader and what then makes them beyond suspicion of being 'personal' and subjective?

This problem remains even if we accept Eliot's theory of a direct transference of emotion, since after all we cannot know for certain that we have had the appropriate emotion causally transferred to us - causation depends upon the circumstances in which both the cause and the effect occur. Eliot's answer to this problem, I think, lies in a return to the Bradleian notion of coherence as our only sign of objectivity. Objects in the world are 'objective' precisely to the extent that they form a coherent matrix in our experience: objects which do not mesh with the relations of the perceived world - dreams, visions and so on -

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1 Eliot, SE, p. 20.

are not objective, or, at lest, do not belong to this level of objectivity. The personal 'feelings' which we experience from the art work cease to be personal insofar as they connect coherently with some evolving structure in the world - that structure being, in this case, a literature, a culture. We can see this process at work in Eliot's definition of taste:

> Taste begins and ends in feeling. Sometimes it is thought that taste is a weak derivative of enthusiasm. What taste is, I suppose, is an organisation of immediate experiences, obtained in literature, which is individually modified in its shape by the points of concentration of our strongest feelings, the authors who have affected us most strongly and deeply. It cannot be had without effort and without it our likings remain insignificant accidents.[1]

The 'insignificant accidents' of personal liking can only be transformed into universalisable values by being part of an organised totality: the responses which are generated out of such an organisation are 'objective' not in being divorced from a subject, but in being a coherent part of the world. The objectivity of the image is thus matched by the objectivity of the response: the latter still depends on association, and association generated out of previous literature as Eliot insists in the above passage, but those associations have been formed into a coherent and thus objective framework.

The step that Eliot was to take as an artist was to use this theory - as Mallarmé had used associationism - as the structuring principle of his art, rather than as an explanation of how art on previous principles had actually worked. Thus what Eliot presents us with in 'Gerontion' or 'The Waste Land' is a set of images, a linguistic structure, whose coherence is not <u>in</u> the poem as we have it on the page, but in the receiving mind, as it was once in the creating mind. The poem operates as the intermediary between two possible coherences and not as, in itself,

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1 Eliot, 'The Education of Taste', <u>The Athenaeum</u>, 4652, (June 27, 1919), p. 521.

a coherent structure. We are given objects and allusions whose purpose is to generate an associational structure which will form itself into a coherent pattern if, (1) it is truly part of an evolving cultural pattern in the world and, (2) if our minds have the appropriate organisation of taste to perceive that pattern. Since we can never know (1) except by having already achieved (2) the burden of responsibility lies with the reader: a poem like 'The Waste Land' is coherent exactly to the extent that the structures of coherence in literature upon which it draws are experienced as such by the reader. By making the artist the only appropriate critic Eliot has, of course, increased the chances of such an accord of minds taking place, but, one has to emphasise, the poem, in terms of the theory by which it is backed, can never be proved wrong or incoherent. Every failure in coherence is ultimately attributable to a failure in the critic: the coherence of the poem lies in the coherence of those few minds who have developed the appropriate and central associative responses from previous literary experience.

It is in this context, I suggest, that Eliot's major poems up to 'Ash Wednesday' were written: we may take the projection of words, images and situations in an evacuated context as a mirror of our fractured and fragmented world, but it is rather a comment on the fractured nature of our own minds that we fail to experience it as a unity. Eliot insists that,

> Permanent literature is always a presentation: either a presentation of thought, or a presentation of feeling by a statement of events in human action or objects in the external world.[1]

but that presentation mediates between two consciousnesses whose response

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1 Eliot, 'The Possibility of Poetic Drama', SW, pp. 64-65.

is an integral part of the work of art as it is in itself, because it is only in the experience of some consciousness. By being a 'presentation' the art provides a counterbalance to that imponderable other mind in which it will fulfil its existence: or rather, it accepts the existence of that other mind and limits itself to what will not impede its taking up its place in that mind. The writer can never be certain of the reception of his work - not in the sense of the judgment to be passed upon it, but what it will come to be and to mean in the minds of others, in the mind of his own nation, in the mind of Europe. Unless, that is, like Hegel writing within earshot of the guns at Jena, the artist has already understood the true lineaments of that incorporating mind of which we are all a part and writes with its associations, its responses in mind. It is only in that corporate mind which is never fulfilled in any of our individual minds that the poem takes on its ultimate significance, that it is properly fulfilled in its associative potential.

The despair in 'The Waste Land', the fragmentation if you like, lies in the fact that it is a poem trying to orientate itself in terms of this larger mind at a point in history when that mind seems on the edge of destruction. Instead of the new work naturally taking its place within the 'existing monuments of art' 'The Waste Land' has to declare in its own structure that it is related to that artistic past and by that very declaration testifies to its sense that the tradition has ceased to operate. No one has the memory and the appropriate stock of associations to see its coherence. The poem pushes its associative demands on the reader to the limit exactly because it sees the associative process at the point of collapse. By incorporating so much material within itself it preserves the tradition, in part, which

it had sought for in its reader's mind: it attempts to carry the past into its own structure because the past is dead in the minds of modern civilisation. Of course, by so doing the poem denies itself to its audience and therefore fulfils the circle of subjectivity which it had sought to escape: the collapse of culture, of shared traditions and so shared associations upon which the poet could depend, is opposed by the poem, but in that very opposition the poem reveals itself as one of the sources of the collapse. By pushing the associative technique to its limits the poem makes it impossible to establish the common ground of shared experience and memory whose demise it bewails.

It is at this point that the poet's wrestle with words and meanings becomes equally a wrestle with the social world around him, for it is only through a change in the nature of the society, a change in the consciousness of those for whom he writes, that his poetry can regain its effectiveness and relevance. For Lancelot Andrewes[1] marks Eliot's new commitments in this direction, but it also marks a change in his attitude towards association; not towards the process itself, but to the way he values certain uses of it:

> Andrewes's emotion is purely contemplative; it is not personal, it is wholly evoked by the object of contemplation, to which it is adequate; his emotion is wholly contained in and explained by its object. But with Donne there is always something else, the 'baffling' of which Mr. Pearsall Smith speaks in his introduction. Donne is a 'personality' in a sense in which Andrewes is not: his sermons, one feels, are a 'means of expression'. He is constantly finding an object which shall be adequate to his feelings; Andrewes is wholly absorbed in the object and therefore responds with the adequate emotion.[2]

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1 T.S. Eliot, For Lancelot Andrewes: Essays on Style and Order (London: Faber, 1970, originally published 1928).

2 Eliot, 'Lancelot Andrewes', SE, p. 351; For Lancelot Andrewes, p. 25.

The anarchic seizing upon an object as the appropriate vehicle for the communication of emotion is replaced here by a humble submission to the object and the emotion which it evokes. The downgrading of 'feeling' and the elevation of 'emotion' is significant of Eliot's shift, not only from talking about literature to talking about sermons, but away from a conception of pure language towards one which is more socially based. But the central change lies in the fact that Eliot no longer conceives of the world as an open arena in which objects may be seized on by emotions at will; there now exists a prior structure of value operating on the objects with which one deals. Andrewes's objects are those given significance by his religion, by which, in turn, 'his intellect was satisfied.'[1] The associations become impersonal not by being there in the objects, or by being anchored in a purely literary coherence, but by being part of a religious coherence to which the individual submits. The objects are anchored in the ritual of the religion and its teachings, and thus they are not given a place by the poet's use of them, but are used because they have a place. The personal is excluded even in its choice of objects or its choice of literary traditions: the one tradition, the one culture defines the associations and establishes the area of common ground.

Eliot's acceptance of Christianity results in a new sense of hierarchy among the possible objects of poetic contemplation and poetic value. It does not, however, do away with the associational base of art, but it does pose a problem to it: those objects which have taken on emotion for the poet have ceased to be transparent modes of making sense of emotion

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1 Eliot, SE, p. 352.

to the poet - only religion can do that - and, I think, Eliot had also come to see the difficulties in the communicative value of these objects. His reconstructed position is outlined in the conclusion to The Use of Poetry and the Use of Criticism; I have quoted a small portion of this before, but I want now to quote the whole passage, which deals with Chapman's borrowings from Seneca and Eliot's borrowings from Chapman:

> There is first the probability that this imagery had some personal saturation value, so to speak, for Seneca; another for myself, who have borrowed it twice from Chapman. I suggest that what gives it such intensity as it has in each case is its saturation - I will not say with 'associations', for I do not want to revert to Hartley - but with feelings too obscure for the authors even to know quite what they were. And of course only a part of an author's imagery comes from his reading. It comes from the whole of his sensitive life since early childhood. Why, for all of us, out of all we have heard, seen, felt, in a lifetime, do certain images recur, charged with emotion, rather than others ? ... such memories may have symbolic value, but of what we cannot tell, for they come to represent the depths of feeling into which we cannot peer.[1]

These objects no longer convey emotion, transfer it from poet to reader: they gesture towards the unconscious which we share and where our communal meanings are, beyond our individual consciousnesses, established. These images that recur call to our own sense of the depths in our own personalities 'into which we cannot peer' while the 'feelings' of the words call to some saturation of our own mind with linguistic associations. Association thus becomes the first stage on the descent towards the much more profound depths of the unconscious patterns of our minds. The allusion to previous art, the image by which we convey our deepest feelings, can no longer be met directly, even by ourselves - they are recalled to be made sense of at a later time by an effort which is 'perilous if not guided by sound theology.'[2]

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1 Eliot, UPUC, p. 148.

2 Ibid., p. 150.

4) Configurations in time: the associationist poem

All literary art is, as Lessing pointed out in The Laokoön, and as Eliot's mentor Irving Babbitt reiterated in The New Laokoön, a process in time: we experience it as temporally extended and its structure is determined by that setting. The associationist poem, however, is not only a happening in present time, in the time of its reading, it is a happening in the past by its deliberate attempt to quicken and introduce into the amalgam of the aesthetic experience memories and sensations that lie dormant in the experiencing mind. As we move into the future, therefore, in reading the poem, we undergo a parallel movement into the past in order to understand what we are experiencing in the present. Each new experience is associatively linked to a series of past experiences and the nature of the experience is thus paradoxical in its temporal construction: it is not merely that the new experience recalls distinguishable past experiences, but that the new experience is of past experiences in a new context. The associations triggered by the aesthetic object are the experience in the present, but are so only because they are recalled from the past by a process which is moving deliberately towards the future. The structure thus imposed on the very form of the experience symbiotically involves the poet in certain kinds of human experiences, in certain kinds of literary content as well. There is almost, as it were, a formal imperative to deal with, on the level of content, the same problems that the poem poses as an aesthetic structure.

I want now to suggest some of the development of this relationship in the period of the dominance of associationist ideas in literary theory, and I will divide it into four stages. The first is best represented by

Gray's 'Elegy written in a Country Churchyard', whose meditative reflectiveness presents us with a train of associated thoughts inspired in the speaker by the scene he is contemplating. The associations are bound together by the visual perspective within which he is situated and by the unitary emotional tone which that perspective induces. As the thoughts move forward in time, though, the associations themselves push back into the past, uncovering the possible hidden signfficances of past lives in exactly the same way that the associative process uncovers previously hidden connections between memories buried in the mind. The movement of the poem towards the past is so strong that in the end it has to see its own act of remembrance as a part of the past in someone else's remembrance -

> For thee, who, mindful of th'unhonour'd dead,
> Dost in these lines their artless tale relate;
> If chance, by lonely contemplation led,
> Some kindred spirit shall enquire thy fate, -
> Haply some hoary-headed swain may say ... [1]

- even although the epitaph requests us not to 'draw his frailties from their dread abode'. For Gray, in this poem, the potential significance and value of human experience can only be considered in memory, but once consigned to memory those values cannot be resurrected to assert themselves in life. The speaker's vision of himself carried to his grave in the same churchyard emphasises for us the extent to which his contemplation of the possible virtues of those buried there had been an exploration of his own unfulfilled possibilities; his search into their past, and their unfulfilled futures, a search into his own, which can only be complete when there are no possible futures and no choices to confuse the purity

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1 Thomas Gray, Poems (London: Everyman, 1963), p. 31.

of imagined pasts. The future which the poem creates as we read through it is a future always retreating into the past.

The second major development of the associative poem is to be found in Wordsworth's 'Lyrical Ballads'. I have already discussed the idea put forward by Wordsworth in the 'Preface' that what he has sought to do is to show the ways in which the world is transformed by a character at some crucial point in his life when his heightened awareness leads to an intensification of the associative process. Here we have, as it were, a dramatised version of Gray's poem, which is also a moment, or series of moments, of heightened awareness on the part of the poet. Much more important, however, to the connections I wish to trace here are the following lines from 'Michael':

> Therefore, although it be a history
> Homely and rude, I will relate the same
> For the delight of a few natural hearts,
> And with yet fonder feeling, for the sake
> Of youthful poets, who among these Hills
> Will be my second self when I am gone.[1]

The pattern of Gray's Elegy is repeated in Wordsworth's assertion that the value of his present act of story telling will only be realisable in the future. This is parallel to the fact that the value of nature to Michael is one that accrues from the memories which it holds for him,

> the hills, which he so oft
> Had climb'd with vigorous steps; which had impress'd
> So many incidents upon his mind
> Of hardship, skill or courage, joy or fear;
> Which like a book preserv'd the memory
> Of the dumb animals, whom he had sav'd,
> Had fed or shelter'd, linking to such acts,
> So grateful in themselves, the certainty
> Of honourable gains; these fields, these hills

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1 William Wordsworth, Wordsworth: Poetry and Prose, ed. W.M. Merchant (London: Rupert Hart-Davis, 1967), p. 194.

> Which were his living Being, even more
> Than his own Blood - what could they less? had laid
> Strong hold on his affections...[1]

The hills are his 'living Being' because his life has been expended on them and they have stored that life for him because they will bring back to mind, through memory's associations, the events which it contained. The landscape is to Michael as the book is to Wordsworth - and thus their identification at the opening of the poem - since each preserves the past for its author. Thus the experience of the poem is one of a double movement into the past; into Wordsworth's own memories of the story of Michael and into the memories the landscape retained for him and of him. The meaning of a present perception is thus always mediated by the past:

> Nor should I have made mention of this Dell
> But for one object which you might pass by,
> Might see and notice not.[2]

The object has no meaning unless memory intervene to provide one for it and a true understanding of nature turns out to be dependent on recalled human significances.

Those significances themselves, however, will vary from individual to individual, and the recognition of that relativity of the associational process leads to a search for the patterns of experience upon which our associations are founded. The meanings of the present can only be understood by uncovering those moments of intensity which have made up the past upon which those meanings are based. The Prelude is subtitled 'Growth of a Poet's Mind' and the organic metaphor seems appropriate in

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1 Wordsworth, ibid., p. 195.

2 Ibid., p. 193.

the context of Romantic theory, but the sense of organism, as something unfolding according to its own inner principles and according to an inherent dynamic, is, in fact, the product of that mind looking back over its development and establishing a relationship between past and present. The sense of necessity comes from the fact that what is found as relevant in the past is determined by the structure of the present, since those events are significant in the past which provide a foundation of meaning for what exists in the present. Wordsworth is justifying his associational pattern as one particularly relevant to the role of poet - thus is it a prelude, both to writing of poetry and to the reader's recognition of Wordsworth's right to speak as a poet and raise his particular set of associations to an importance above those of his audience - though the role of poet is defined by the environment of Wordsworth's associations. The acts of the present are thus defined and justified by the past: the meaning of Wordsworth's poetry is the meaning of his past experience in relation to his present statements, and it is, apparently, only an accident of birth and environment that Wordsworth can assert his voice to be the authentic voice of the natural world.

The Victorian dramatic monologue is perhaps best seen in terms of this development as the fusion of the two poles of Wordsworth's achievement. It is the investigation of character through the associations by which a particular consciousness is formed. The poet escapes the historically determined limitations of his own associations by attempting to reconstruct the associative process of a character determined by history. Much more significant, and therefore constituting the third stage in the elaboration of the associative principle in poetry, are the developments

in French literature and, particularly, the poetry of Mallarmé. In Mallarmé's work the associative principle for the first time becomes something to be used as an element of communicative form rather than something illustrated or analysed as an aspect of content. The poet sets about exploiting the existence of associations in his reader rather than presenting them and assuming a sympathetic understanding of that presentation. The reader's own associations are invoked as part of the matrix of the experience of the poem; they are not invoked merely as an analogy to what the poem presents, but as the completion of what is contained by the words on the page. 'Completion', however, is probably the wrong word, for the reader is not expected to complete the poem, but to escape from it: the poem is the means towards the achievement of a transcendental beauty which is reached through poems, but cannot be encapsulated within them.

The associationist principle forms, as it were, the rungs of the ladder upon which the reader escapes, moving away from the given towards that silence which precedes and transcends all communication. Mallarmé creates images which will have a vagueness, an incompleteness at the heart of them, through which the reader reaches towards that which is beyond the poem. But again we are confronted with a double movement: the movement away from the poem is, however, a contradictory one. On the one hand, there is a striving for the ideal, for an escape, through the window opened by the poem, towards some purer realm of existence; but on the other hand the psychological mechanism with which the reading of the poems is inextricably linked, associationism, depends upon the accidental accretions of the past. Instead of a movement into a higher realm, what we have is a movement into the banalities of our own past;

instead of an escape from a material universe into an ideal perfection we retreat into the equally determined pattern of our own existence in time.

Mallarmé's common image of the window emphasises the spatial aspect of the escape with which his poems so often concern themselves. The material world is the all-encompassing trap for the human soul, as is suggested by the famous 'Le vierge, le vivace et le bel aujourd'hui':

> Tout son col secouera cette blanche agonie
> Par l'espace infligée à l'oiseau qui le nie
> Mais non l'horreur du sol où le plumage est pris.
>
> [His whole neck will shake off this white agony
> inflicted by space on the bird that denies it,
> but not the horror of the earth where his feathers
> are caught.][1]

The swan, like the poem, denies the space in which it is trapped, seeking an escape into a perfection which, in fact, cannot be achieved. That escape is parallel to the situation of the poem itself, which wishes to communicate an experience of the transcendent but is trammelled by the stubborn existence of the words by which it communicates. The swan as _signe_, as pure conception, cannot escape from the _parole_ in which it is lodged nor from the swan, as existent, to which it is tied.

The pure meaning and the pure image which the poem invokes are denied by the contingency of their referrents and the contingency of the psychological processes through which they will be understood by readers. The image is trapped, no matter how aetherial it attempts to become, by the fact that the meanings and associations which it generates are functions of the mundane past it wishes to escape. The reader reaches this peak of the ladder towards transcendence only to find himself being

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1 Stéphane Mallarmé, 'Le vierge, le vivace et le bel aujourd'hui', _Mallarmé_, trans. Anthony Hartley (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1965), p. 86.

turned back towards his own life and his own experiences. The generalising power of word and image cannot overcome the particularising process by which these generalities come to be meaningful to us and, like the swan, they are forever trapped by the actual, unable to fulfil the universal which they contain:

> Fantome qu'a ce lieu pour son eclat assigne,
> Il s'immobilise au songe froid de mepris
> Que vêt parmi l'exil inutile le Cygne.
>
> [A phantom condemned to this place by his pure
> brilliance, he stays motionless in the cold
> dream of scorn worn in his useless exile by the swan.][1]

The transformation of the individual - 'cygne' - into the general - 'Cygne', of the actual into the idea, can produce only a frigid immobility. The poem ends on that point of stasis, acknowledging a transcendent which is yet trapped by 'this place', and so describes its own process in our minds, for, having reached that idea of the swan our only way of comprehending what it is we have reached is by recollecting the temporal development of the poem itself. The scornful immobilisation is a scorn of our inability to set the idea of the swan free from the processes by which we achieve the idea. The ideal which we have been led towards remains trapped within the process of the actual - the temporal process of reading the words that constitute the poem. The word 'Cygne' is left at the end of the poem, signifying, isolated, glorious perhaps, but having failed to escape the forms, syntactic and poetic, in which it is placed.

Mallarmé's Swan points outwards, away from the poem and from reality, but for the reader its ideality can only be understood by its pointing

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1 Ibid.

backwards to the accumulation of meanings which the poem has provided: understanding the word 'Cygne' may be a pointer to a flight into another realm, but that flight can only be contemplated because the word itself is a flight into the past, semantically a flight through the significances which have accrued to the word and its image in the reader's mind. The flight from the actual is always prevented by the flight of the word into the past. And this, it seems to me, is the aspect of Mallarmé's use of language which comes to be integral to the practice of poetry in British 'modernism': language as used by Yeats and Eliot is always language that has to seek its meanings in the past and therefore must always be directed towards a subversion of the present in favour of the past in order that that language can reassert its meaningfulness towards the present. The word seeks the associations in the reader's mind, or works towards the creation of associations in the reader's mind, and through that past attempts to reach a more universal realm, a timeless realm, which will not be a product of the contingencies of ordinary life in time, and which, by being universal, will reassert the relevance of the words to the present and the future.

In order to illustrate more fully the kind of language the associationist theory produces I want to compare it - briefly - with the very different view of language offered by Sartre.[1] Sartre suggests an analogy between language and the body: language is for the individual a means of operating in and on the world in the same way that the body is. It is something

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1 See particularly Qu'est-ce que la littérature, p. 18 ff. and L'Être et le Néant: Essai d'ontologie phénoménologique (Paris: Gallimard, 1947), Part three, chapter III, 'Les relations concrètes avec autrui'. For a brief but enlightening study of Sartre's theory of language see Anthony Manser, Sartre: A Philosophic Study (London: Athlone Press, 1966), ch. vii.

one is, as it were, inside, unaware of, because one is only aware of what one is trying to do with it to affect the world in which one exists. It is something directed at the world, projected into it and therefore always pointing into the future. It is for this reason that in Qu'est-ce que la littérature Sartre makes the distinction between 'literature' and 'poetry' I have already mentioned, since poetry, he claims, is a misuse of language. The kind of poetry he is thinking of is one that comes very much from the tradition which I have been discussing, and Sartre sees in it language which has become aware of its own workings in the way we only become aware of our bodies when they malfunction:

> On n'est pas écrivain pour avoir choisi de dire certaines choses mais par avoir choisi de les dire d'une certain façon. Et le style, bien sûr, fait le valeur de la prose. Mais il doit passer inaperçu. Puisque les mots sont transparents et que le regard les traverse, il serait absurde de glisser parmi eux des vitres depolies.[1]

Poetry fails in these terms because 'parler c'est agir'[2] and poetry, taken up with contemplating the internal properties of its own language, refuses to act: it reflects back into the mind instead of out into the world.

Sartre is not concerned with discussing the nature of this poetry, but contrasting it with language as he sees it in operation allows us a context in which we can discern one of the central features of language based on associationist conceptions: it is language, when used at its purest, which is constantly moving back into the past to seek its significance in the accretions of memory. Within the associationist

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1 Jean-Paul Sartre, Qu'est-ce que la littérature, p. 32.

2 Ibid., p. 29.

framework meaning can only be achieved through memory, in remembered sensations with which the word is associated, and, therefore, the very use of words is a function of the past since their associations have to be invoked at every moment in order that they can be significant. Equally, the images which are built up out of individual lexical units take their aura, their emotional content from a similar appeal to the past. Thus it can only be through memory that the experience of an art object is formulated: there can be no direct awareness of the object, but always one mediated through the series of associations which memory provides. It is memory which is therefore the crucial intermediary not only between the observer and the object but between artist and audience: what the artist provides is structured and informed by the pattern of his own associations, his own memories, conscious or otherwise, while the reader's experience can in turn only be generated through the appeal of the given to his own associative framework. There is no direct route from author to audience; communication becomes a perilous effort to reach common ground in discrete pasts.

An odd paradox is generated by these two views of language: Sartre's conception insists on the need for us to act, but in so doing he makes language itself something passive, something which we use, to which we give our activity; the associative theory, however, transforms language into action - it has become an act before which we are passive. The words strike off from our memory the associations which are held there and set them to work in forming the total experience of the work, but once we start to read the poem we have no control over what will happen in us - we have opened our past to the poem's inspection. The poem probes us for the meanings which our past contains, but it is not a probing which

the poet undertakes, the poem is as separate from him, he is as passive before it, as we are. In making language a tool in our struggle with our environment Sartre has made it passive except for our application of activity through it. Even as recipients of this language we are always above it, controlling it:

> The very fact of expression is a stealing of thought since thought needs the cooperation of an alienating freedom in order to be constituted as an object. That is why this first aspect of language - in so far as it is I who employ it for the Other - is sacred. The sacred object is an object which is in the world and which points to a transcendence beyond the world. Language reveals to me the freedom (the transcendence) of the one who listens to me in silence.[1]

Language as it functions in an associative situation, however, is language which is itself a transcendence, since it is it which goes beyond the world: it is not in the world because its meanings are always over and above either its creator or its recipient.

The transcendence which this language fulfils, however, is the transcendence of past over present, and since this is how language <u>acts</u> upon consciousness there is a tendency for it to be taken as the role to which language must be adapted by the poet. Indeed, it will only be a poetry which is concerned at the level of <u>content</u> with the importance to the present of the past that will be able to fully embody itself through this kind of language. The attempt to contain within the language some effort on the writer's part towards the future will necessarily be perverted by the very language he uses as long as it is language conceived in these terms. The context which defines the form of the poem defines

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1 I have quoted this passage from Hazel Barnes's translation, <u>Being and Nothingness</u> (London: Methuen, 1969), p. 374, because of the difficulties of Sartre's technical vocabulary. The original can be found in <u>L'Être et le Néant</u>, pp. 441-442.

also the limits of its content.

Poetry of this sort, however, will always be an incomplete object, not only because it needs the reader's associative response in order to make it fully exist, but because it is always divorced, as an object in the present, from its real sources in the past. In order to exist fully in the present it must always attempt to make that past to which it is tied an operative part of its present context so that its existence can become secure. The past upon which it depends is only maintained by the thin web of memory, and the poem, by its very nature, will attempt to break down the barriers of temporality and retain the past as a secure part of the present. It will, in other words, attempt to destroy the distinction upon which its very processes are founded: the poem must keep the past alive in the present in order that it will not become obsolete - by becoming meaningless - through the passing from the world of the memories within which it is formulated.

Memory, however, does not exist separately from individuals who have memories and the poem's dependence is therefore on modes of existence which will perpetuate not only the specific memories appropriate to its particular concerns, but memory in general. The poems work only on condition that the processes of time have created a store of memories significant to what they offer, and yet the poems must oppose the processes of time which would discard those memories as no longer relevant: the past must be preserved within the present which would relegate it to the past. Each poem is therefore the focus of a double battle - to overcome time itself in order to establish its meanings in the present from the past, while at the same time working on the present to preserve the role of memory upon which the success of the former struggle is founded.

Each poem too must perform a cyclic movement: it reaches the present only by seeking meaning in the past, but by exercising those meanings it keeps them alive in the present and so makes its continued operation on the present possible: the memories which it generates and activates are the context which makes its raids upon the past possible in the future. But always there remains the priority of the past: in order to exist at all in the present it must support those forms of thought which are retentive of the past - and forms of thought are not separable from forms of life. Every poem, thus, is not only an activity in its own right in relation to the reader's consciousness, but the embodiment by its very existence of an imperative directed towards the social world in which he has his existence, a demand, ultimately a political demand, for a form of life suited to its form of language. In 'The Song of the Happy Shepherd' Yeats wrote:

> But O, sick children of the world,
> Of all the many changing things
> In dreary dancing past us whirled,
> To the cracked tune that Chronos sings,
> Words alone are certain good.[1]

Words alone survive the destructive change which is the process of the world in time, but Yeats was to discover that the poet's song too went

> To the cracked tune that Chronos sings

and that the stability of words can only be achieved through a stability of the social world in time. To save the words from losing themselves, by losing their meanings in the past, one had to save the world from changing in directions which would be inimical to the preservation of a particular kind of memory, and the associations it made possible.

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1 W.B. Yeats, Collected Poems (London: Macmillan, 1965), p. 7. Hereafter cited as CP.

CHAPTER TWO

THE POEM AND ITS WORLD: YEATS

1) Audience and Artist

In this and the following chapters I want to examine the changing nature of the poem's relationship with the world in the developing context of Yeats's and Eliot's use of associationist principles in their aesthetic thinking. Each of them started, in their different ways, working from the conception of a 'pure' poetry. For Eliot this involved the separation of poetry from all other concerns: for Yeats, the purity was directed towards a much more aetherial poetic achievement, but from disgust of the same kind:

> I saw ... that Swinburne in one way, Browning in another, and Tennyson in a third, had filled their work with what I called 'impurities', curiosities about politics, about science, about history, about religion; and that we must create once more the pure work.[1]

The desire for a pure poetry was a desire for the poetry distinguished by Hallam as the 'poetry of sensation', a poetry which would produce nothing but distinct images in the mind and would call up from the mind's recesses, by the process of association, its own most potent memories.

Even a pure poetry, however, does not exist in a vacuum: it is written to communicate, or at least to form a communion, with some audience. The poem cannot appeal on the basis, though, of any recognised standards or any intellectually approved formulations. Even in the act of being made public, the poem remains a private event which succeeds or fails on

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1 Yeats, Autobiographies (London: Macmillan, 1955), p. 167. See also 'The Symbolism of Poetry' (E&I, p. 155): 'The scientific movement brought with it a literature which was always tending to lose itself in externalities of all kinds, in opinion, in declamation, in picturesque writing, in word-painting, or in what Mr. Symons has called an attempt "to build in brick and mortar inside the covers of a book".'

the foundation of the reader's own memories, on the poem's ability to excite those memories and bring them back to consciousness. It can, of course, only do so if the mind in question has memories, and memories of a specific kind, to be excited. The question of the audience and its consciousness, therefore, comes to the forefront of the critical problem. Unless there is an audience which has the appropriate kind of consciousness, or unless the poet can direct his works to that segment of the community which is capable of responding appropriately, the work will have no communicative effect whatsoever.[1] Alison, if we might return to him for a moment, had well understood the nature of problem created by an associationist aesthetic when he made the following observation:

> How much this operation of the mind [criticism] tends to diminish the sense of beauty, every one will feel, who attends to his own thoughts ... It is this, chiefly, which makes it difficult for young people, possessed of imagination, to judge the merits of any poem or fable and which induces them so often to give their approbation to compositions of little value. It is not that they are incapable of learning in what the merits of such compositions consist; for these principles of judgment are neither numerous nor abstruse. It is not that greater experience produces greater sensibility, for this everything contradicts; but it is, because everything, in that period of life, is able to excite their imaginations, and to move their hearts, because they judge of the composition, not by its merits, when compared with other works, or by its approach to any abstract or ideal standard, but by its effect in agitating their imaginations, and leading them into that fairy land in which the fancy of youth has so much delight to wander.[2]

The disjunction between imaginative effect and critically established value is one of the dynamic contradictions of Alison's aesthetic; for Yeats

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1 Cf. Memoirs, p. 215: 'One difficulty in all our public arts - architecture, plays, large decorations - is that there are too many different tastes to please... All creation requires one mind to make and one for enjoyment; the theatre can at rare moments create this one mind for an hour or so, but this grows always more difficult.'

2 Alison, Essays, pp. 7-8.

there can be no such neo-classic division - the value of the poem lies in its power of affecting the imagination. If it is true that, as Alison implies, the older one gets the more one substitutes criticism for real experience, so much the worse for age, and for criticism. There were audiences which had not succumbed to the divisive effects of such an abstract ideal:

> I would have Ireland re-create the ancient arts, the arts as they were understood in Judaea, in India, in Scandinavia, in Greece and Rome, in every ancient land; as they were understood when they moved a whole people and not a few people who have grown up in a leisured class and made this understanding their business.[1]

Nationalism provides Yeats with both the images which will move and the audience who will be moved by those images.

The tendency of associationist psychology had always been towards a kind of democracy of intellect: as Wordsworth recognised, every man has a mind stocked with images and the peasant perhaps more so than the city dweller. It is a view which Yeats - first and last Romantics in this agreeing - also supports, but it does not lead him, as it did Wordsworth, to espouse a radical politics in his youth. His attendance at Morris's socialist gatherings seems to have made little real impact on him, for as early as 1896 he is able to insist that the development of civilisation will eventually be explained by some sort of 'general conflict theory', one which shows how,

> a race of superior intellectual power compelled or persuaded a race of lesser intellectual power to feed it and house it, in return for the religion and science which it had thus found the leisure to make, and to pass on from generation to generation in always growing complexity.[2]

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1 Yeats, E&I, p. 205.

2 Frayne I, p. 410.

Yeats explains his acceptance of this theory (put forward by J.S. Stuart Glennie in the introduction to a translation of Greek folk poetry) by the fact of his 'being no democrat in intellectual things, and altogether persuaded that elaborate beauty has never come but from the mind of a deliberate artist writing in leisure and in peace.' The leisure of the artist can only come about through the existence of an elite, but the poet ought not to write only for such an elite. To do so would be to cut himself off from the great traditions of the human mind which build up the innumerable associations with which his work must be permeated:

> I filled my imagination with the popular beliefs of Ireland, gathering them up among forgotten novelists in the British museum or in Sligo cottages. I sought some symbolic language reaching far into the past and associated with familiar names and conspicuous hills that I might not be alone amid the obscure impressions of the senses.[1]

The escape from isolated subjectivity can only be made by keeping open the connections between present existence and the traditions which the whole people have developed through the ages. Those traditions, however, are to be found only where there is also a traditional life such as Yeats found in the West of Ireland:

> When one talks to the people of the West of Ireland, and wins their confidence, one soon feels that they live in a very ancient world, and are surrounded by dreams that make ... all unusual things and places, and the common crafts of the country always mysterious and often beautiful ... The principal crafts were once everywhere, it seems, associated with magic, and had their rites and their gods.[2]

The description which Yeats provides in this passage is parallel to his later description in his Journal of the nature of a great work of art:

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1 Yeats, E&I, p. 349; 'Art and Ideas' (1910).

2 Frayne II, p. 167: 'Ireland Bewitched', (The Contemporary Review September, 1899.)

> A great work of art, the 'Ode to a Nightingale' not less than the 'Ode to Duty', is rooted in the past, as the Mass which goes back to savage folk-lore.[1]

The work of art and the consciousness of the peasantry share the same relation to the knowledge and experiences which have become part of a traditional memory, a traditional way of experiencing life. The maintenance of that way of life is antipathetic to any democratising tendency, because democracy would be a destruction of tradition, a break with the continuity by which the imagination is fed. The rationale of such a view was probably provided by O'Leary, Yeats's mentor in nationalism:

> He had no philosophy; but things distressed his palate, and two of those things were International propaganda and the Organised State, and Socialism aimed at both, nor could he speak such words as 'philanthropy', 'humanitarianism', without showing by his tone of voice that they offended him.[2]

Any of these innovations changed the nature of the common mind and thereby made the associative process impossible, since the mind could no longer travel back from the immediately given to its sources in 'savage folk-lore'.

For Yeats such a tradition represents, almost, a kind of classicism: its roots are the same roots that produced the epics of Greece and because of this he was able to see the Protestant and Catholic traditions in Ireland as expressions of the same spirit. In 'Poetry and Tradition' he describes the Ireland imagined by O'Leary and says that he was among 'the last to speak an understanding of life and Nationality, built up by the generation of Grattan, which read Homer and Virgil';[3] at the end of the same essay he describes the folk mind:

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1 Yeats, Memoirs, p. 180.

2 Yeats, Autobiographies, p. 211.

3 Yeats, E&I, p. 246.

> Whenever I have known some old countryman, I had heard stories and sayings that arose out of an imagination that would have understood Homer better than The Cotter's Saturday Night or Highland Mary, because it was an ancient imagination, where the sediment had found time to settle, and I believe that the makers of literature could still take passion and theme, though but little thought, from such as he. On some such old and broken stem, I thought, have all the most beautiful roses been grafted.[1]

For both Protestant and Catholic memory travels back, unbroken, to the most ancient cultures, to the most primitive past. The traditions within which they exist in the present may be different, but they share a common consciousness of the relationship of past to present.

The artist is held out the possibility, by each of these groups, of an audience which is the fit receptor of his art and which can be joined, by the common symbols of their nationhood, into a single audience with a single purpose. In an entry in his diary about some Augustus John etchings Yeats writes:

> These bodies are the bodies of clerks and seamstresses and students, of all upon whom the burden of sedentary life weighs heavily, or of those broken by some kind of labour. A gymnast set to train the body would find in all these some defect to overcome, and when he had overcome them he would have brought them in every case nearer to that ancient canon which comes down to us from the gymnasium of Greece, and which when it is present marks, like any other literary element, a compact between the artist and society, a purpose held in common with his time to create emotions or forms which Nature also desires.[2]

The equation established between the artist, the society and Nature by Yeats in this passage reflects his belief that there is a norm, both universal and natural, for the human imagination; that there is a common area of experience or potentiality in all men in which all art - or all

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1 Yeats, E&I, p. 250.

2 Yeats, Memoirs, p. 188.

great art - finds its foundations. Perhaps coincidentally, perhaps by that strange ability of Yeats's to make of the most casual occurrences of his own life the patterns of art, his earliest surviving piece of critical prose is a celebration of those universals in the work of Sir Samuel Ferguson:

> Almost all the poetry of this age is written by students, for students. But Ferguson's is truly bardic, appealing to all natures alike, to the great concourse of the people, for it has gone deeper than knowledge or fancy, deeper than the intelligence which knows of difference - of the good and the evil, of the foolish and the wise, of this one and that - to the universal emotions that have not heard of aristocracies, down to where Brahman and Sudra are not even names.[1]

Yeats evidently feels in Ferguson's poetry the achievement of emotional equivalents to the most basic human categories of experience. William Allingham, on the other hand, is criticised by Yeats on the failure to achieve this kind of universality - a failure which is a product of a failure of personality:

> He is essentially the poet of the accidental and fleeting - of passing artistic moments ... He had no sense of the great unities - the relations of man to man, and all to the serious life of the world. It was this that kept him from feeling Ireland as a whole.[2]

Yeats must have thought this point worth repeating and developing for the following appears in a later essay on Allingham:

> He saw neither the great unities of God or of man, of his own spiritual life or of the life of the nation about him, but looked at all through a kaleidoscope full of charming accidents and momentary occurrences. In greater poets everything has relation to the national life or to profound feeling; nothing is an isolated artistic moment; there is

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1 Frayne I, p. 101, 'The Poetry of Sir Samuel Ferguson' (Dublin University Review, November, 1886).

2 Frayne I, p. 212, 'A Poet we have neglected', (United Ireland, December 12, 1891).

> unity everywhere, everything fulfils a purpose that is not its own; the hailstone is a journeyman of God, and the grass blade carries the universe upon its point. [1]

There are, therefore, according to Yeats, several great unifying emotions which link together the discrete elements of men's lives and it is these which the poet should deal in; or else the poem should reveal the essential relationship of part to whole within the totality of the universe. Whether directed inwards or outwards no thing should stand alone, no thing should not lead the mind to other larger areas of existence or to a recognition of symbolic status; Yeats wrote in criticism of the Irish popular ballad: 'The grass is merely green to them and the sea merely blue.' [2]

In these early essays Yeats is making two different critical demands upon Irish writers of the past: the first is that they find that area of common experience which lies in the great emotional past of the people, something which has been built up over generations and which can be activated in any individual no matter what the accidents of his personal experience may be; the second that no object be seen isolated from the processes of the whole universe. This looks like a metaphysical demand, a demand that the poet sees everywhere something akin to Baudelaire's 'correspondances', but it is, I think, basically a linguistic demand, though one that perhaps generates metaphysical conclusions. What Yeats requires is that no word stand isolated; that each word brings with it or is given within the poem a set of meanings or reverberations which

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1 Frayne I, p. 260, 'William Allingham', in The Poets and Poetry of the Century, ed. Alfred Miles (London, 1892).

2 Frayne I, p. 162, 'Popular Ballad Poetry of Ireland', (Leisure Hour, November 1889).

carry the mind beyond the given towards greater areas of experience and meaning. The first demand relates to the content of a poem, that it should correspond to the emotions which have the widest and deepest foundations in human experience, the second is an aesthetic demand related to language - that language should always achieve a certain depth and that the world described should therefore partake of that depth, that mystery. The two demands are not antipathetic: each is directed towards evoking from the audience the potentialities of memory to the enhancement of the poem, and therefore to a deeper contact between artist and audience.

The two techniques, however, refer to two basically different literary forms: the first refers primarily to the epic, narrative poem with its description of events which invoke the great passions of the race, the second to the lyric which seeks a universal statement from a particular instance. Yeats's tendency at this time was perhaps to seek too much for effects drawn from the primitive depths of association provided by the epic; at least, that is what he suggests in Memoirs in describing the help given him by Edwin Ellis, his co-editor of Blake:

> I had still the intellectual habits of a provincial, and fixed my imagination on the great work to the neglect of detail - my Wanderings of Oisin were but the first of a whole Légende des Siècles and so on - but I learned for the first time that I might find perfect self-expression in the management of a cadence. He complained that 'Shy in the doorway' in one of my early poems was abominable, because 'Shyin' was the name of a Chinaman, and though I did not alter the line I acquired a more delicate attention to sound.[1]

His discovery of the potentialities of a more sophisticated art did not turn him against the primitive bases; rather, it led him to an attempt

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1 Memoirs, p. 31.

to reveal the essential unity of the two:

> Irish literature may prolong its first inspiration without renouncing the complexity of ideas and emotions which is the inheritance of cultivated men, for it will have learned from the discoveries of modern learning that the common people, wherever civilization has not driven its plough too deep, keep a watch over the roots of all religion and all romance. Their poetry trembles upon the verge of incoherence with a passion all but unknown among modern poets, and their sense of beauty exhausts itself in countless legends and metaphors that seem to mirror the energies of nature.
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> Dr. Hyde has collected many old Irish peasant love-songs, and, like all primitive poetry, they foreshadow a poetry whose intensity of emotion, or strangeness of language, has made it the poetry of little coteries.[1]

The audiences at which the two forms are directed are united in the nature of their consciousnesses, so that what at first would appear to be an incompatibility becomes in fact the source of unity. Ellis's false or inappropriate association leads Yeats to a subtilisation of his technique that remains the essential basis of primitive art - its ability to weave multiple potentialities from a single narrative focus. To this Yeats adds the sense of multiple potentiality from a single linguistic focus that belongs to the culture of the elite.

The unified audience could remain only an intellectual construction, however, in a situation in which Yeats's actual poetic productions reached only a few people - and many of them not in Ireland.[2] In a sense there is a theoretical problem here, because for the writer who operates on an

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1 Frayne II, p. 118. 'The Literary Movement in Ireland' (North American Review, December, 1899).

2 See Memoirs, p. 89: 'The condemnation of Wilde had brought ruin upon a whole movement in art and letters The Rhymers were not affected; we had all written for the smaller public that has knowledge and is undisturbed by popular feeling. We were a little more unpopular than those [who] did not read us; it was necessary to avoid a little more carefully than before young men studying for the army and the imperfectly educated generally, but our new books would still sell out their editions of perhaps three hundred copies.'

associationist basis only the reactions of a large number of individuals can tell him whether or not he has achieved the level of universality of great art, or whether his work is a function of purely personal connections. The sieving of universal from accidental can be helped by studying the traditional culture of the people, but only the response of the people can reveal whether the new work is in conformity with that traditional mind. Yeats's increasing attention to the drama - until for several years it dominated his whole creative output - was an attempt to discover that unified audience. In the drama one could appeal to both kinds of traditional mind, the one which desired narrative and the one which desired complexity of language. And moreover, the two groups would be brought physically together into a single audience.

The key linking concept which makes the drama the fit medium for the creation of an integrated audience is what Yeats described as common to both primitive and coterie art - 'intensity of emotion'. For the one, a narrative structure presented an imitation of men experiencing intense emotion with which the audience could identify, which would generate associations out of their own emotional experience; for the other, the linguistic structure generated associations whose intensity was a function of their previous literary experience.[1] The drama presents the great human situations and emotions which Ferguson is capable of invoking in a form in which they can be given an intense degree of concentration, and thus the essence of the aesthetic possibilities of the epic can be isolated:

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1 Cf. Eliot's adoption of a similar tactic at a later date: 'In a play of Shakespeare you get several levels of significance. For the simplest auditors there is the plot, for the more thoughtful character and conflict of character, for the more literary the words and phrasing, for the more musically sensitive the rhythm, and for the auditors of greater sensitiveness and understanding a meaning which reveals itself gradually.' UPUC, p. 153.

'What attracts me to drama is that it is, in the most obvious way, what all the arts are upon a last analysis. A farce and a tragedy are alike in this, that they are a moment of intense life.'[1] On the level of content, then, the drama is successful if it gets its dramatic effect by imitating what will itself be intense in real life: 'what moves natural men in the arts is what moves them in life, and that is, intensity of personal life, intonations that show them, in a book or a play, the strength, the essential moment of a man who would be exciting in the market or at the dispensary door.'[2] The imitation of the great primal emotions must necessarily create a response in the audience, but this does not mean the drama has itself to be imitative: realism is the destruction of intense action, but even more is it the destruction of intense speech. It is this that Yeats attacks in the modern drama:

> It cannot become impassioned, that is to say, vital, without making somebody gushing and sentimental. Educated and well bred people do not wear their hearts upon their sleeves, and they have no artistic and charming language except light persiflage and no powerful language at all, and when they are deeply moved they look silently into the fireplace.[3]

The reason for the failure of speech is an interesting one: it is educated and well bred people of whom we are speaking and they have no language because they are so inward. Their moments of most intense emotion are reflective, and so cannot be communicated to the audience. Yeats finds a place in his hierarchy of literary types for the modern novel because it can take us inside the psychological workings of the character, can

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1 'First Principles, Ex., p. 153.

2 E&I, p. 265.

3 E&I, p. 274.

follow the associative processes which the drama can only suggest are taking place. Educated and well bred people, however, are also those who have inherited the culture of the past and there is therefore a direct contradiction in attempting to present their reflections and experiences in a form which insists on the modernity of their context. The working out of the contradiction comes a few pages later in 'Discoveries':

> Emotion ... grows delightful and intoxicating after it has been enriched with the memory of old emotions, with all the uncounted flavours of old experience; and it is necessarily some antiquity of thought, emotions that have been deepened by the experiences of many men of genius, that distinguishes the cultivated man. The subject-matter of his meditation and invention is old, and he will disdain a too conscious originality in the arts as in those matters of daily life where, is it not Balzac who says, 'we are all conservatives'? He is above all things well-bred, and whether he write or paint will not desire a technique that denies or obtrudes his long and noble descent.[1]

Real emotional effect, and the kind of emotional effect which most accords with the nature of the best modern minds, can only be achieved by presenting that which directs the mind back into a long history of past associations. Emotion can only be intense and interesting where it feeds on the enrichment of the past: paradoxically, a real imitation of the intensity of modern thought and emotion can only be achieved by using a vehicle which is already steeped in the emotions of the past, and which therefore calls them to participate and intensify the emotion of the present.

Intensity as an imitation of intense moments in life must, therefore, be linked with the intensity of the psychological processes by which such intensity can be communicated to the audience. By linking these two aspects contained in the single concept of 'intensity' Yeats hoped to

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1 Yeats, E&I, p. 284.

be able to reach his national, integrated audience. Drama of this kind would be able to speak 'to vigorous and simple men whose attention is not given to art but to a shop, or teaching in a National School or dispensing medicine.' The purpose is not to reach a mass audience, but to reach one which is sufficiently large 'for what is accidental and temporary to lose itself in the lump.'[1] The elimination of accidental and temporary emotions or associations can only be achieved, however, if there is some common basis that the play can reach down to and activate. Yeats believed in the first years of the century that this was certainly true of the Irish-speaking community:

> One could still, if one had the genius, and had been born to Irish, write for these people plays and poems like those of Greece. Does not the greatest poetry always require a people to listen to it? England or any other country which takes its tune from the great cities and gets its taste from schools and not from old custom may have a mob, but it cannot have a people.[2]

- and that it was possible perhaps to find, even in those who spoke English only, some core of national feeling to which the play could appeal. Dublin evidently, was not the Galway Plains, its people not those who, 'like all who have Celtic minds and have learnt to trust them', have in their 'hands the keys of those gates of the primeval world, which shut behind more successful races, when they plunged into material progress.'[3] Even so, Yeats's hopes for his Irish theatre ran to the achievement of some version of that integrated spiritual community through the effect of their plays on the Dublin audiences:

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1 Yeats, E&I, p. 265.

2 Yeats, E&I, p. 213.

3 Frayne II, pp. 44-5, 'Miss Fiona Macleod', (The Sketch, April 28, 1897).

> The curious imaginative sterility of what are called the Irish educated classes has its source in that spirit of antagonism to the life about them, which until recently has cut them off from the foundations of literature, and left their imaginations cold and conventional. That small minority, which from time to time, has divided itself into a class, has been so fruitful in imagination that one understands how much evil has been worked by a bad theory and how great the flood may be once the flood-gates have been lifted. Victor Hugo has said that in the theatre the mob becomes a people, and, though this could be perfectly true only in ancient times when the theatre was a part of the ceremonial of religion, I have some hope that, if we have enough success to go on from year to year, we may help to bring a little ideal thought into the common thought of our times. The writers, on whom we principally depend, have laboured to be citizens, not merely of that passing and modern Ireland of prosaic cynicism and prosaic rivalries which it may be their duty to condemn, but of that eternal and ancient Ireland which has lived in old times in tender and heroic tales and in the unwearied love of many thousand men and women who have been poor in all other things.[1]

I have quoted this passage at length, though my subject is not Yeats's drama, because it encapsulates so fully the nature of that literary nationalism which Yeats utilised in his poetic practice too but which he hoped could be created more effectively in the public domain of the theatre. The educated class have cut themselves off, according to Yeats, from the 'foundations of literature', those foundations being the experiences passed on from ancient times as the art of the race. It is an art of an eternal Ireland, its eternity, however, consisting not in the longevity of a particular social organisation - though perhaps founded upon that - but in the repetition of 'tales' that have satisfied a people's minds. That eternal Ireland may never have existed outside of its artistic formulation, but it is the consciousness of those tales that have moulded the inner form of the people's minds and which therefore offer the only

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1 Frayne II, p. 141, 'The Irish Literary Theatre', (Dublin Daily Express, January, 1889).

permanent basis for art to appeal to. It is by being fitted to arouse the associations generated from the memories encapsulated in those previous cultural forms that the new forms will become both national and eternal.

By 1910 Yeats's view of Ireland's potentialities had suffered a profound setback. Working in the theatre had given him a different kind of awareness of his countrymen and of the state of the community, one that challenged the assumptions of his previous convictions about art and its relationship with the social world. The basis of this change was the realisation that there had emerged in Ireland a class whose nature corresponded with the kind that was produced by modern societies, and was therefore limited by the 'plunge into material progress'. Modern society had destroyed the preconditions of art in the general mind because it had made men cease to feel the power of those intense moments and intense emotions upon which all great art is based: 'Poetical tragedy, and indeed all the more intense forms of literature, had lost their hold on the general mass of men in other countries as life grew safe.'[1] The growth of safety in Ireland saw that aesthetic danger, the danger of a form of mind which had no sense of intensity, appear from an unexpected quarter:

> John O'Leary had spent much of his thought in an unavailing war with the agrarian party, believing it to be the root of change, but the fox that crept into the badger's hole did not come from there. Power passed to small shopkeepers, to clerks, to that very class who had seemed to John O'Leary so ready to bend to the power of others, to men who had risen above the traditions of the countryman, without learning those of cultivated life or even educating themselves ...[2]

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1 Yeats, E&I, p. 259, 'Poetry and Tradition', 1907.

2 Yeats, E&I, p. 260.

The creation of such a class in Ireland, a class distinctively of the modern world, destroyed for Yeats the possibilities which he had previously regarded as most central to the creation of a new Irish culture. It did so by destroying the unique place that Ireland held among the societies of Western Europe, cockpit of the modern world:

> Alone among nations, Ireland has in her written Gaelic literature, in her old love tales and battle tales, the forms in which the imagination of Europe uttered itself before Greece shaped a tumult of legend into her music of the arts; and she can discover, from the beliefs and emotions of her common people, the habit of mind that created the religion of the muses.[1]

No longer could the artist hope to find such a community created out of a communal art and a common inheritance in the common people of Ireland: the nature of that people had been, by the social changes of the period, entirely transformed.

Such a change was only of overriding importance to Yeats because of the theory of the relationship between artist and audience which his associationist presuppositions committed him to. Had there been any ultimate standards of value to which the writer might appeal, he could have gone on working in the same way and waiting for his work to be vindicated by those standards. But there were no standards, there was only the successful transmission of an image or an event in such a way that it would activate the latent associative process of the audience. If there were no common associations among the audience, or no associations sufficiently ancient to produce that constant wandering of the mind along a unified train which Yeats describes as his own response to poetry, there could be no poetry. The artist was incapable of finding out those

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1 Frayne II, p. 193, 'The Literary Movement in Ireland', (North American Review, December 1899).

associations by purely personal effort: they had to come out of the whole life of the people, since it was only in the life of many generations that the accidental could be stripped away from the core of permanent associations. The changes in Yeats's view of art and of society over the crucial period surrounding the Playboy riots are not to be seen as solely re-evaluation of his own personality and of the failures of his previous art. The re-evaluation is conducted within the context of a certain view of the workings of the mind - a view which, I maintain, is associationist - and Yeats's response to the new situation is an attempt to maintain that basic epistemology, that basic conception of how a poem transmits itself from mind to mind, despite the social changes around him.

During the years 1902 to 1908, according to Ellmann,[1] Yeats wrote virtually no lyrics; in 1907 he began work on the ill-fated The Player Queen, which was to cause him so many difficulties before he managed to finish it; both facts point to the enormous realignment which Yeats was undertaking, and which, by 1916, in his essay 'Certain Noble Plays of Japan', would lead to the break-up of the unified audience, as outlined in passages such as the following:

> Realism is created for the common people and was always their peculiar delight, and it is the delight to-day of all whose minds, educated alone by schoolmasters and newspapers, are without the memory of beauty and emotional subtlety. The occasional humorous realism that so much heightened the emotional effect of Elizabethan tragedy - Cleopatra's old man with an asp, let us say - carrying the tragic crisis by its contrast above the tide-mark of Corneille's courtly theatre, was made at the outset to please the common citizen standing on the rushes of the floor; but the great speeches were written by poets who remembered their patrons in the covered galleries.[2]

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1 Richard Ellmann, Yeats: the Man and the Masks (London: Faber, 1961), p. 168.

2 Yeats, E&I, p. 227.

Yeats's use of 'remembered' in the final sentence of that passage shows the extent to which he brings the same qualities to the writing of prose as to verse: the poets who remember their patrons are remembering the importance of memory itself to the creation of the highest art. In remembering their patrons they write for minds stocked with memories of beauty and so create a language whose meanings go far beyond the dull realities of the given. The passage itself performs that act of remembrance in its use of the word, and therefore reveals a potentiality of language which is alien to the realism of the mob:

> A poetical passage cannot be understood without a rich memory, and like the older school of painting appeals to a tradition, and that not merely when it speaks of 'Lethe wharf' or 'Dido on the wild sea banks' but in rhythm, in vocabulary; for the ear must notice slight variations upon old cadences and customary words, all that high breeding of poetical style where there is nothing ostentatious, nothing crude, no breath of parvenu or journalist.[1]

Yeats's turning away from the 'people' towards an aristocracy is forced upon him because it is only among an aristocracy that he can find minds stocked with the appropriate memories to respond to the form as well as to the content of art. An audience may respond to the intensities of some human situation presented by the dramatist, but it cannot really experience intense emotion from an aesthetic object unless it has the memories which will be set off by the stimulus and so create an intensity of experience in their own minds. To please such an audience as was evolving in Ireland was to deny the very basis, as Yeats had analysed and understood it, of all great art.

The problem by which Yeats was faced had already, like so much else

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1 Ibid.

in this area of his aesthetic thinking, received formulation in Alison's essays. Alison recognised the associative power of language itself and realised at least part of the implications of this:

> Besides these, Language itself is another very important cause of the extent of such associations. The analogies between the qualities of matter, and the qualities of mind, which any individual might discover or observe, might perhaps be few, and must of course be limited by his situation and circumstances; but the use of language gives, to every individual who employs it, the possession of all the analogies which so many ages have observed, between material qualities, and qualities capable of producing emotion. Of how much consequence this is, may be discovered in the different impressions which are made by the same objects on the common people, whose vocabulary is limited by their wants, and on those who have had the advantages of a liberal education.[1]

Alison realises that there will be an enormous gap between the capacity for associative response in the educated mind and in the 'common' mind, at least where association is based on subtleties of speech and language; the mind which studied previous works of art will possess a much wider range of potential responses to the nuances of language than one whose use of language has been restricted to utilitarian needs. It is exactly on such a basis that Yeats adopts the forms of the Noh drama:

> 'Accomplishment' the word Noh means, and it is their accomplishment and that of a few cultivated people who understand the literary and mythological allusions and the ancient lyrics quoted in speech or chorus, their discipline, a part of their breeding.[2]

The Noh, as <u>form</u>, demands a kind of mind, a kind of culture, in which the past is still alive, in which memory has not been destroyed. Yeats's recognition of the death of memory - and therefore of the essence of

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1 Alison, <u>Essays</u>, p. 132.

2 Yeats, <u>E&I</u>, p. 229. Engelberg, in his important chapter 'Multitude and Intensity', also points out that the Noh drama was not such a radical shift for Yeats as it might on the surface have seemed.

of culture - in the Dublin middle classes, drove him to a defence of aristocracy because, in the modern world, that aristocracy was the pre-condition of art. By understanding the associative context within which Yeats saw the processes of art as being effective, we can see how this was not merely personal affectation or accident of historical circumstance in Yeats. Ellmann suggests that, 'it was in this period that Yeats makes ludicrous attempts to ally himself with the aristocracy',[1] but unless Yeats could ally himself with the aristocracy there could be no possibility, in terms of his own theory, of his producing great art - given the nature of his times and the nature of the social preconditions of art.

I am not suggesting that Yeats's position on this is correct; what I am insisting upon is the coherence of Yeats's response to his changing perception of the world. As far as Yeats is concerned, a poem is not just a set of words on the page to be appreciated or not by anyone who happens to look, it is a process of transference, a movement between minds and the nature of those minds is an essential factor in the achievement of the poems. In those minds continuity between past and present is an essential precondition for the associative process if it is to pass beyond the bounds of the temporary and accidental events of any individual's life, and it is this that has been lost in Ireland: 'everything has to take its trial before the dull sense and the hasty judgment, and the character of the nation has so changed that it hardly keeps but among countrypeople, or where some family tradition is still stubborn.'[2] In seeking to

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1 Ellmann, Yeats: the Man and the Masks, p. 180.

2 Yeats, E&I, p. 324.

understand this loss, Yeats naturally assumed as an evaluative measure that class in Ireland which could still boast such tradition, such memory, and particularly, of course, that class as he found it personified in Lady Gregory. As he describes it in Memoirs, Lady Gregory's house represents for Yeats the very form of his aesthetic assumptions, though he carefully makes his own family's failure in this respect the accident of an 'act of God':

> My grandmother's house was a new house; the sailing ship had foundered that was bringing my great-grandfather's possessions to Sligo, among them his sword and a clock so remarkable my grandfather would say there was 'only one other like it in the world'. But here many generations, and no uncultivated generation, had left the images of their service in furniture, in statuary, in pictures, and in the outline of wood and field.[1]

His support for the aristocracy is thus based not on a social snobbery (though of course the man was no less frail than any other) but on the aristocracy's provision of the preconditions of real aesthetic experience. The existing aristocracy is not upheld because it is an aristocracy, but because it provides that appropriate context which is lacking everywhere else. Thus Yeats is able to redefine aristocracy in terms of those preconditions in 'Poetry and Tradition':

> All who have any old traditions have something of aristocracy, but we have had opposing us from the first, though not strongly from the first, a type of mind which had been without influence in the generation of Grattan, and almost without it in that of Davis, and which has made a new nation of Ireland, that was once old and full of memories.[2]

It is from the strength of the opposition that Yeats takes his cue for the support he gives to aristocracy; it is an opposition he has always fought,

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1 Memoirs, p. 102.

2 E&I, p. 250.

but the peasantry in whose name he fought it before is a class squeezed into insignificance by the nature of the modern world.

The insistent continuity of Yeats's associationist conceptions can be seen in his entries in the Journal about the response to two Abbey Theatre plays in 1909:

> In the four morning papers Time is cursed or ignored and The Cross-roads given great praise, more than any of our plays has had for a year at least. Yet not one of the morning papers mentions or, as it seems, understands the central idea of the play ... They prefer mere logic, even when they do not understand it, to suggestion, which alone is the foundation of literature. State a logical proposition and the most commonplace mind can complete it. Suggestion is richest to the richest and so art grows unpopular in a democracy like this.[1]

The essence of art is its suggestive ability, but suggestion is only possible where the mind is sufficiently prepared to be suggestible and it is therefore only to such minds that the arts can turn for an audience. Entry 138 in the Journal returns to the distinction that Yeats has here set out and reveals the way in which his aesthetic theory can influence and determine his social thinking:

> I see that between Time, suggestion, and Cross-roads, logic, lies a difference of civilization as well as of art. The literature of suggestion, richest to the richest, does not belong to a social order founded upon argument, but to an age when life conquered by being itself and the most living was the most powerful. What was leisure, wealth, privilege but a soil for the most living.[2]

The aristocracy which he has come to support is the last bastion of a different - and better - kind of civilization, but it is so because it develops those aspects of mental activity which are conducive to the effectiveness of an art of 'suggestion'. No matter how many words or gestures the drama, or the poem, performs it is a dumbshow unless the

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1 Memoirs, p. 207.

2 Memoirs, p. 209.

audience can not only hear, but hear within themselves the multiple echoes from which the given words derive their power. If that kind of art is to survive, and after all, according to Yeats, it is the only real kind of art, then the poet must be committed to the social order which makes it possible: 'And in suggestive drama there must either be enough loosening and slackening for meditation and the seemingly irrelevant, or a chorus, and neither is possible without rich leisurely minds in the audience, lovers of Father Time.'[1]

The creation of a pure poem in such a context, turns out, therefore, to be much more than the ridding of the poetic matrix of unwanted elements drawn from the social life of the community; to create a pure poetry necessitates, in fact, a much stronger emphasis on the nature of the community, because that purity can only be understood in, or find a place in, a certain kind of cultural atmosphere. The more pure one desires the poetic object to be, the more does one demand of the social context. The poem is not made separate from the social context, but made entirely dependent on it, and Yeats's increasingly extreme political and social position is no more than a reflection of his difficulty in finding a society which will support the kind of mind which can act as a fit audience for his type of art. The impurities which the nineteenth century poets included in their work become even more important to the poet when they are cast out of the work and so are no longer controllable within the aesthetic context itself. In 'Art and Ideas' (1913) Yeats at once outlines that isolation of art from life, and affirms his associationist conception of art:

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1 Memoirs, p. 210.

> We knew that system of popular instruction was incompatible with our hopes, but we did not know how to refute it and so turned away from all ideas. We would not even permit ideas, so greatly had we come to distrust them, to leave their impressions on our senses. Yet works of art are always begotten by previous works of art, and every masterpiece becomes the Abraham of a chosen people. When we delight in a spring day there mixes, perhaps, with our personal emotion an emotion Chaucer found in Guillaume de Lorris, who found it from the poetry of Provence; we celebrate our draughty May with an enthusiasm made ripe by more meridian suns ...[1]

Our moments of intense experience are not ours alone, are not separated from the life of the society in which we are members, but are produced by a mixture of ideas and emotions which have developed in different times and places and commingled with the general life of which we are a part. Because of their ancient lineage such emotions can not be pure; around them are all that men have ever believed or sought and that place in the whole life cannot be denied:

> The old images, the old emotions, awakened again to overwhelming life, like the gods Heine tells of, by the belief and passion of some new soul, are the only masterpieces. The resolution to stand alone, to owe nothing to the past, when it is not mere sense of property, the greed and pride of the counting-house, is the result of that individualism of the Renaissance which had done its work when it gave us personal freedom.[2]

Yeats's point is that the argument for a pure poetry is itself an argument that is relative to a particular point in time; if one is really committed to the aesthetic (and again Yeats pays homage to Hallam in this essay) one cannot deny the whole of life, because so many of the ideas we encounter in the process of reverie, of association, are themselves the products of non-aesthetic experiences. Works of art may depend on other works of art -

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1 Yeats, E&I, p. 352.

2 'Art and Ideas', E&I, pp. 352-353.

as our associations with May depend on some southern poet - but those previous works of art did not accept the divorce which Yeats and others, in their youth, had accepted between the arts and the rest of life: 'Why should a man cease to be a scholar, a believer, a ritualist before he begin to paint or rhyme or to compose music, or why if he have a strong head should he put away any means of power?'[1]

The recognition that art is dependent on the community and on a certain kind of community for its very existence forces Yeats not only to pay heed to other areas of life than the purely aesthetic, but also to question the role of art in relation to that community. It is here that the dialectic of poem and external world which I examined previously is relevant: I argued that a landscape became an important source of poetic material because of the common associations which it was capable of generating, but that, equally, it was primarily capable of generating such associations because of the significances that had been accorded to it in previous works of art. The art which seeks an intensity of life

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1 E&I, p. 353. Yeats was perhaps, in these comments, being a little less than fair to his own younger self; he several times insists in his early essays on such unity of being: 'It is a poetry of action, for such alone can arouse the whole nature of man' (Fr. I, 84); 'I well remember the irritated silence that fell upon a noted gathering of the younger English imaginative writers once, when I tried to explain a philosophy of poetry in which I was interested, and to show the dependence, as I conceived it, of all great art upon conviction and upon heroic life.' (Fr. I, 248). Yeats's later attitude was perhaps helped to a sense of its own importance by finding support in Nietzsche, especially in Twilight of the Idols, section 24 of 'Expeditions of an Untimely Man'. Nietzsche attacks pure art as a denial of the artist's search for the meaning of art, which is life: '"Rather no purpose than a moral purpose!" thus speaks mere passion. A psychologist asks on the other hand: what does all art do? does it not praise? does it not glorify? does it not select? does it not highlight? By doing all this it strengthens or weakens certain valuations ...' This passage was given especial emphasis in the edition of Nietzsche which Yeats used, that of Thomas Common.

as its subject matter needs to be able to find that intensity of life in its community but it can only do so if the community is already imbued with a sense of intensity which it has developed from previous art.

Yeats did not always hold this view: in his earliest writings he evidently believed in a crude version of the theory that he later developed in terms of the 'mask': a theory that the imagination seeks the opposite of the environment within which it exists. Yeats was directed towards this view, I think, in attempting to understand and account for the nature of the Irish legends which he found among the peasantry:

> The peasant remembers such songs and legends, all the more, it may be, because he has thought of little but cows and sheep and the like in his own marriage, for his dream has never been entangled by reality. The beauty of women is mirrored in his mind, as the excitement of the world is mirrored in the minds of children, and like them he thinks nothing but the best worth remembering. The child William Blake said to somebody who had told him of a fine city, that he thought no city fine that had not walls of gold and silver. It may be that poetry is the utterance of desires that we can only satisfy in dreams, and that if all our dreams were satisfied there would be no more poetry.[1]

The ordinary life of the people was so bare, so unrelieved, that their memories naturally seized only upon the exceptional and retained it, creating a self- contained world of associations that transformed the ordinary world around them. Behind such a statement lies the idea of the active imagination, the Romantic concept of the imagination which has often been presented as entirely opposed to the associative process. This opposition, I hope, has been, or will shortly be dispelled, but if there is an opposition it is one that Yeats clung to:

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1 Frayne II, 'The Literary Movement in Ireland', p. 190.

> It is small wonder that this book [Douglas Hyde's translation of Gaelic folk tales] should be beautiful, for it is the chronicle of that world of glory and surprise imagined in the unknown by the peasant as he leant painfully over his spade. His spiritual desires ascended into heaven, but all he could dream of material well-being and freedom was lavished upon this world of kings and goblins.[1]

Art thus becomes an ultimate compensation for the failures of life, a failure which may be personal, as Yeats suggests in 'Discoveries': 'The blind man became a poet, as he became a fiddler, in our villages, because he had to be driven out of activities all his nature cried for, before he could be contented with the praise of life.'[2] On the other hand, the rediscovery of the Irish legends may itself be no more than the discovery that the modern world suffers an impoverishment similar to that of the peasant:

> Here at last is a universe where all is large and intense enough to almost satisfy the emotions of man. Certainly such stories are not a criticism of life but rather an extension, thereby much more closely resembling Homer than that last phase of 'the improving book', a social drama by Henrik Ibsen. They are an existence and not a thought, and make our world of tea-tables seem but a shabby penumbra.
>
> It is perhaps, therefore, by no means strange that the age of 'realism' should be also the harvest-time of folk-lore. We grow tired of tuning our fiddles to the clank of this our heavy chain ...[3]

The modern world may be comfortable enough, but it is spiritually poor and so must return to the dreams of those who suffered real poverty in order to discover its means of escape: 'We who have less terrible need dream less splendidly.'[4]

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1 Frayne II, 'Irish Folk Tales', p. 189.

2 'Discoveries', E&I, pp. 277-8.

3 Frayne II, p. 187.

4 Frayne II, p. 189.

The dreaming which the two groups are involved in is, however, essentially distinguished, though Yeats seems to wish to ignore the distinction. The dreaming of the peasant involves, especially in those tales of fairies and spirits which Yeats collected in Mythologies, a belief in another world which exists parallel to that of our ordinary reality. The cultured poet who interests himself in those dreams is seeking a symbolic sphere for his own emotions, which, no matter how similar to the peasant's, cannot be the same. What links the two groups is that each seeks a wider life in something which goes back into the past. For the peasant the fairies and spirits may be of the present, but for the sophisticated literati they are a means towards the past:

> Once upon a time the Celtic nations worshipped gods of light, called in Ireland Tuath-de-Danan and corresponding to Jupiter and his fellows, and gods of the great darkness corresponding to the Saturnian Titans. Among the sociable fairies are many of the light gods; perhaps some day, we may learn to look for the dark gods among the solitary fairies. The Pooka we can trace, a mysterious deity of decay, to earliest times.[1]

The fairies, ghosts and witches of the Irish countryside provided the educated mind with the beginnings of the essential process of all art, according to associative theory, the mind's progression into the past. In this case it is not a personal past, but a whole cultural past: the peasant may think that what he experiences is of the present, but it is really the last trace of the past and he has as much to learn from the modern poet as the modern poet has to learn of him. Yeats gives the same justification for his interest in Irish history and legend:

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1 Frayne I, p. 137, 'Irish Fairies, Ghosts, Witches etc.' (Lucifer, January 1889).

> Our history is full of incidents well worthy of drama, story and song. And they are incidents involving types of character of which the world has not yet heard. If we can put those tumultuous centuries into tale or drama, the whole world will listen to us and sit at our feet like children who hear a new story.[1]

Yeats's use of the word 'tumultuous' is interesting: it suggests the effect of the past on the imaginations of the present as well as describing their actual nature; and the implications of age over youth in the rest of the world's listening to Irish stories like children cannot be ignored. However, Yeats goes on in the same essay, 'The Irish National Literary Theatre', to offer the following:

> And if history and the living present fail us, do there not lie hid among those spear heads and golden collars over the way in the New Museum, suggestions of that age before history when the art legends and wild mythology of earliest Ireland rose out of the void? There alone is enough of the stuff that dreams are made on to keep us busy a thousand years.[2]

Yeats uses the term 'suggestions' here in exactly the way that he uses it consistently throughout his aesthetic writings to imply the associationist element in art. Art can be created out of the imitation of that which is already full of suggestions of the past exactly because art itself is a seeking of the meanings of the past from some image, object or scene in the present. The alternative world of dreams, therefore, that world to which we escape from the failures of the modern world or from our actual existence, is only possible because of the memories which the community has stored for us, either in its stories and legends or in its research into such things. The apparently antithetic world of the

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1 'Irish National Literary Society', in Horace Reynolds (ed.), Letters to the New Island (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard, 1934), p. 159.

2 Ibid.

imagination comes to be the descendent of a past which did not represent an antithetical, but an actual world, which the passage of time and the progress of civilisation has divorced us from.

The essence of all our aesthetic experience is, therefore, not only entirely dependent on the past, but declining in intensity with the process of time as we lose touch with the deepest recesses of that past. The dependence on the past of Yeats's conception of beauty can be seen in the description in Autobiographies of his dream of Innisfree:

> There was a story in the county history of a tree that had once grown upon that island guarded by some terrible monster and borne the food of the gods. A young girl pined for the fruit and told her lover to kill the monster and carry the fruit away. He did as he had been told, but tasted the fruit; and when he reached the mainland where she had waited for him, he was dying of its powerful virtue. And from sorrow and from remorse she too ate of it and died. I do not remember whether I chose the island because of its beauty or for the story's sake, but I was twenty-two or three before I gave up the dream.[1]

There is a passage in 'First Principles' which describes the fall from grace that has overtaken the poet from the time when there could be such direct connection between past and present, between imagination and reality. The change in the personal life that has occurred with advancing age is a microcosm of the pattern of European history: both are a decline:

> Yesterday I went out to see the reddening apples in the garden and they faded from my imagination sooner than they would have from the imagination of that old poet who made the songs of the seasons for the Fianna, or out of Chaucer's. that celebrated so many trees. Theories, opinions, these opinions among the rest, flowed in upon me and blotted them away. Even our greatest poets see the world with preoccupied minds.[2]

The substitution for the direct knowledge of the story of Innisfree the

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1 Autobiographies, p. 72.

2 Explorations, 'First Principles', p. 149.

abstract knowledge of the modern world is a destruction of the imaginative perception of the world. Such destruction comes about because of the divisions between the areas of life which theories and opinions impose upon the mind. The preoccupied mind is that which is not in a state of reverie, which is not free to receive whatever associations the mind may cast up to surround what is given in perception; the given is already classified, abstracted before the mind can respond to it. It is this classification and abstraction which Yeats believes to have broken the 'unity of being': 'I thought that the enemy of this unity was abstraction, meaning by abstraction not the distinction but the isolation of occupation or class or faculty.'[1] That division between all the elements of life, both in the totality of individual life and perception and in the whole social fabric, is the destruction of the imagination because it prevents the free interplay of the associative process. And without that interplay how is the mind to reach beyond the casual knowledge of the individual, or escape from the formulations of a fragmentary group within society? Doing away with the apparently accidental connections of the associative process commits one to the accidents of time and place; whereas the conjunctions of the association are, in the end, a revelation of the universal truths of humanity.

There can, therefore, be no art, in a community which has denied the unity of being, that is not partial, fragmented. The only way back to unity of being, at the individual and the social level both, is literally that - a way back. Art can only become significant again in a community which does not separate one thing off from another; the

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1 Autobiographies, p. 190.

community can only become such a community if it rediscovers itself in the art of the past and so makes possible for the art of the present the intensity which it, in turn, can only gain by an awareness in the audience of past art. What art offers to the society in return for what social reintegration offers art, is a life more intense, more significant than any that it has in the modern world. A man who is separated from the past of his own culture is one who cannot be fully a man because, like an art separated from its past, he has no knowledge of achievement against which to measure himself; and, equally, he has no future to which to leave his memory as a standard, because there is no whole, no continuity of national identity to which he belongs. In 'Ireland the Arts' Yeats makes his most direct, utilitarian plea for the kind of art he is advocating, though it is one as yet untouched by the practical politics he was to learn later:

> Art and scholarship like these I have described would give Ireland more than they received from her, for they would make love of the unseen more unshakable, more ready to plunge deep into the abyss, and they would make love of country more fruitful in the mind, more a part of daily life. One would know an Irishman into whose life they had come - and in a few generations they would come into the life of all, rich and poor - by something that set him apart among men. He himself would understand that more was expected of him than of others because he had greater possessions. The Irish race would have become a chosen race, one of the pillars that uphold the world.[1]

Despite its mystical tone the implication of Yeats's description is clear. After several generations of his kind of training, the arts would have created not only a nationality, but a sense throughout the nation of noblesse oblige. The two go hand in hand, because nationality is itself a literary product which generates unconsciously a sense of purpose in

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1 E&I, p. 210.

the community through its effect on the leading minds of the time. The nation is not a political unit, but an idea and fulfils itself by living out its idea:

> A nation can only be created in the deepest thought of its deepest minds - the literature that makes it (and this making takes a long time) - who have first made themselves fundamental and profound and then realized themselves in art. In this way they rouse into national action the governing minds of their time - few at any one time - by an awakening of their desire towards a certain mood and thought which is unconscious to these governing minds themselves. They create national character. Goethe, Shakespeare, Dante, Homer have so created.[1]

What Yeats charges the community with is a forgetfulness that their very form of existence is the product of an idea; they live inside an idea created out of art and that idea needs to be renewed by a continual attention to art if the community, and with it their own best selves, is to survive.

The situation that Yeats is describing has to be understood not in some generalised sense, not as some vague sense in the mind of a politician of a national ideal, but as a very specific functioning of the associative principle. Just as the mind in contemplating a work of art is never only experiencing what is given as perception, but is equally experiencing an intense level of association, so the man in acting is not only acting out of present consideration, but in the light of the multiple examples with which the associative principle surrounds him. He acts not only as

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1 Memoirs, p. 248; cf. Eliot, Notes towards the Definition of Culture, p. 107: 'There is also the danger that education - which indeed comes under the influence of politics - will take upon itself the reformation and direction of culture, instead of keeping to its place as one of the activities through which a culture realises itself. Culture cannot altogether be brought to consciousness; and the culture of which we are wholly conscious is never the whole of culture: the effective culture is that which is directing the activities of those who are manipulating that which they call culture.'

himself, but with the whole past of his nation, as it has found its form in its arts, in his blood:

> I do not think these country imaginations have changed much for centuries, for they are still busy with those two themes of the ancient Irish poets, the sternness of battle and the sadness of parting and death. The emotion that in other countries has made many love-songs has here been given, in a long wooing, to danger, that ghostly bride. It is not a difference in the substance of things that the lamentations that were sung after battles are now sung for men who have died on the gallows.
>
> The emotion has become not less, but more noble, by the change, for the man who goes to death with the thought -
>
> It was with the people I was,
> It is not with the law I was,
>
> has behind him generations of poetry and poetical life.[1]

The generations and the memories, like the furnishings of the aristocrats' houses, are the preconditions of a selfless heroism. The highest human actions are committed, as the highest art is experience, in the midst of multitude. Action, like poem, becomes the search for a universal, something that oversteps the bounds of our ordinary existence and links the little world of the individual with the whole of the universe. Yeats finds something of this in the ancient Irish stories:

> This power of the bards was responsible, it may be, for one curious thing in ancient Celtic history: its self-consciousness. The warriors were not simply warriors, the kings simply kings, the smiths simply smiths: they all seem striving to bring something out of the world of thoughts into the world of deeds - a something that always eluded them.[2]

These 'conscious strivings' are attempts to make the world over into the form given it by the poets; the consciousness, however, is unnecessary in the best ages, for there is no distinction between the ideals of poet and man of action.

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1 'The Galway Plains', E&I, pp. 212-3.

2 Frayne I, p. 164, 'Bardic Ireland' (Scots Observer, January 1890).

Yeats had hoped to live in such an age; in 1886, embarking on his own epic 'The Wanderings of Oisin',[1] Yeats is able to finish an essay on Sir Samuel Ferguson with the confident assertion of the relation of past to present and a confident appeal to the actions which that unity ought to evoke:

> Of all the many things the past bequeaths to the future, the greatest are great legends; they are the mothers of nations. I hold it the duty of every Irish reader to study those of his own country till they are familiar as his own hands, for in them is the Celtic heart.
>
> If you will do this you will perhaps be saved in their high companionship from that leprosy of the modern - tepid emotions and many aims. Many aims, when the greatest of the earth often owned but two - two linked and arduous thoughts - fatherland and song. For them the personal perplexities of life grew dim and there alone remained its noble sorrows and its noble joys.
>
> I do not appeal to the professorial classes ... but to those young men clustered here and there throughout our land, whom the emotion of Patriotism has lifted into that world of selfless passion in which heroic deeds are possible and heroic poetry credible.[2]

In this passage Yeats provides a comprehensive survey of what was to remain central in his conception of the poem's relationship with its society throughout his life. In the first place, though there may be a racial base to nationality, it can only be reached by acquired aculturation. The individual has to be provided with the emotions of his nation through its previous culture, and if he is not given it at his mother's knee he must study to acquire it. It is only out of literature that a continuing national identity can be forged, and it is in the context of that national identity that heroism and nobility are possible. The impersonality which a common associative context gives to art, a common purpose within the

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1 Ellmann, Man and the Masks, p. 51, offers this date as the starting point for Yeats's work on the poem.

2 Frayne I, p. 104.

associations of art gives to action. The dialectic is complete, however, when the passage ends with the fact that nationhood and its deeds make credible a heroic poetry. We might produce a heroic poetry, but it could have no effect unless the audience for which it is intended has an emotional context which will make it possible for them to understand. The context in this case is a living and heroic nationalism.

The new class, the change in the social condition of Ireland, which Yeats saw as the destruction of the capacity for memory upon which all aesthetic experience is based, is also the class which destroys the capacity for such nobility. The two potentialities, art and nobility, are dependent on the same psychological faculties and those faculties, memory and association, are destroyed by the new urban middle classes.

> Immediate victory, immediate utility became everything, and the conviction, which is in all who have run great risks for a cause's sake, in the O'Leary's and Mazzini's as in all rich natures, that life is greater than a cause, withered, and we artists, who are the servants not of any cause but of mere naked life, and above all of that life in its nobler forms, where joy and sorrow are one, Artificers of the Great Moment, became as elsewhere in Europe protesting individual voices.[1]

The loss of a sense of past and future, the commitment only to the utilities of the moment is the equivalent in action of a commitment to naked perception. That commitment is the destruction of the potentialities of art not only in that it deprives the artist of an audience which is a complete nation, but it also deprives the artist of those great individuals whose actions are the material equivalent of his poems. It is action which expresses the whole man and the artist needs, therefore, because of his own enforced passivity, to discover his unity in a complementary

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1 Yeats, 'Poetry and Tradition', E&I, p. 260.

figure, one whose life has the same relation to past and to nation that the work has. The death of Parnell destroys, for Yeats, the process of the dialectic: there will be no more nobility of action to play the counterpoint to the artist's nobility of conception; without that nobility of action the artist's subject matter ceases to be credible, ceases to find a real response in his audience. An audience which has forgotten the nature of nobility cannot provide the appropriate emotional focus for a poetry which, like nobility itself, depends on a sense of the past, of one's performing an act which is not personal, but is surrounded by the potentialities of past generations. The artist creates the 'Great Moment' in art only because it can exist in life; its existence as art is the foundation of its existence in life because art is the creator of the context of memories which makes an individual capable of self-sacrifice; without that self-sacrifice, the artist's similar sacrifice will have no pre-eminent focus for its potentialities. Audience and artist are not separate and antipathetic: each creates the other and completes the other's effort; the poem as an associational unit is incomplete until filled out by the reader's own memories, as a social act it is incomplete until fulfilled by some man's actions. The pure and private poem of Yeats's early beliefs has, in the effort of its elucidation, discovered itself as pre-eminently social, a moment whose purity of intent is only possible within a context in which the impurities have been already resolved; a context where artist and audience rediscover a mutual frame of reference in which opinion and argument, all that is merely personal or merely of its own time, is burned away, in which the individual word and individual act is replete with the associations of the nation's past:

When Pearse summoned Cuchulain to his side,
What stalked through the Post Office? What intellect,
What calculation, number, measurement, replied?
We Irish, born into that ancient sect
But thrown upon this filthy modern tide
And by its formless spawning fury wrecked,
Climb to our proper dark, that we may trace
The lineaments of a plummet-measured face.

2) Symbol and Ontology

Associationism, as I have pointed out, is not only a psychological theory but also a theory of language. We are assumed, within the associationist framework, to have learned to use language by learning with which object in the world to associate the particular sounds that our language contains. We learn the connection between the word 'blue' and the colour by having it often pointed out to us that various objects of that colour are 'blue': the repetition of the ostensive definition in the end makes this connection between the word and the colour inevitable. Given one part of the connection, the associative faculty will necessarily bring out of its store the other. The associative process is, however, one that always works, as it were, in excess of what is necessary: it is not only the essential, but also the accidental which will be called up by any word. A penumbra of alternative possibilities will arise as well as the central core of association upon which common meanings are based. It is the penumbra which is the real basis of poetic creation, not the core; it is from the accumulated associative possibilities around the core that the poet draws the linguistic variations which inform the reader's experience.

In order to allow the penumbra to come into effect, however, we must prevent our attention from being directed towards the core and the process in which we become aware of these associations is that of reverie. It

is when the mind is suspended from its ordinary occupations that it passes along the train of associations according to the logic of the penumbra and not according to the ostensive logic of the core. Yeats describes the process in 'Per Amica Silentia Lunae' in relation to the proper role of criticism as outlined by Goethe:

> He described some friend who had complained of literary sterility as too intelligent. One must allow the images to form with all their associations before one criticises. 'If one is critical too soon' he wrote, 'they will not form at all.' If you suspend the critical faculty, I have discovered, either as the result of training, or, if you have the gift, by passing into a slight trance, images pass rapidly before you. If you can suspend also desire, and let them form of their own will, your absorption becomes more complete and they are more clear in colour, more precise in articulation, and you and they begin to move in the midst of what seems a powerful light. But the images pass before you linked by certain associations, and indeed in the first instance you have called them up by their association with traditional forms and sounds.[1]

The process of reverie as thus described involved the abstention from all active mental effort: anything connected with the will and therefore with one's own purposes in life interferes with the energies which the associative process can generate of itself. The mind divorced from all practical purposes is allowed to drift into the gradual revelation of hidden contents. To be so suspended is, as in dreaming, to be raised out of the normal flow of cause and effect - is, in effect, to be out of time. Suspended in this way, what one experiences is an image which does not belong to the actual time in which it occurs, but belongs to some

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1 All quotations from 'Per Amica Silentia Lunae' are from Yeats's Essays (London: Macmillan, 1924) in which the essay appears as the final section, pp. 479-538. It will be footnoted hereafter as Yeats, Essays: the present quotation is from pp. 508-9. It is interesting to compare Yeats's presentation of Goethe's thought here with Alison's version of the same process within the associative reading of a poem: 'This operation of the mind [criticism] tends to diminish the sense of beauty.' (Alison, Essays, p. 7).

other time, or, indeed, to some realm of existence beyond time and place altogether:

> Our most elaborate thoughts, elaborate purposes, precise emotions, are often, as I think, not really ours, but have on a sudden come up, as it were, out of Hell or down from Heaven. The historian should remember, should he not? angels and devils not less than kings and soldiers, and plotters and thinkers. What matter if the angel or devil, as indeed certain old writers believed, first wrapped itself with an organised shape in some man's imagination?[1]

In that moment of revelation or insight we participate in something which exists beyond time, but paradoxically we can only do so because of something - association - which is an essentially temporal process. In reverie our minds travel through a series of connected associations, and in doing so are moving through a temporal sequence, image following image as moment follows moment. That temporal sequence, however, turns out to be a denial of time; at its most intense it reveals to us elements which have no place themselves <u>in</u> time. An essentially temporal process is thus the means to a transcendence of time: 'the end of art is the ecstasy awakened by the presence before an ever-changing mind of what is permanent in the world, or by the arousing of that mind itself into the very delicate and fastidious mood habitual with it when it is seeking those permanent and recurring things.'[2] The essential paradox of all associative art is that that which defies time - the work of art - can do so only by invoking the processes of time and change in the flow of associations. If this is true of the structure of our appreciation of art or of the artist's reverie, it will also prove to be true internally

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1 'Magic', <u>E&I</u>, p. 40.

2 'Discoveries', <u>E&I</u>, p. 287.

of the work of art. It can only become something that defies time, which lasts beyond the moment of its creation, by its concentration on that which is within time:

> The poet must not seek for what is still and fixed for that that has no life for him ... but be content to find his pleasure in all that is for ever passing away that it may come again.[1]

Poetry must find as subject matter those objects - 'the beauty of a woman, in the fragile flowers of spring, in momentary heroic passion, in whatever is most fleeting'[2] - which are most like the process by which it will be experienced.

The changes I have described in the previous section in Yeats's idea of the audience are based on the destruction of the preconditions of this paradoxical moment. Severe violence is done to Yeats's thought if we assume that for Yeats the work of art is something transcending time: it does transcend time, but only by, paradoxically, committing itself to the process of time embodied in the chain of associative connections which the work generates in the reader. The apparently inconsistent turning back, in 'Sailing to Byzantium', to

> what is past, or passing, or to come.

is, in fact, demanded by the logic of the aesthetic experience itself. One can only be out of time through a process which is essentially temporal. It is a question of time and eternity, not time or eternity.

The time which Yeats invokes on such occasions is a time replete with continuity. Yeats's relationship with Pater has received some critical attention[3] but on the relationship between art and time Yeats's theory

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1 Ibid.

2 Ibid.

3 See, for instance, Kermode, Romantic Image (London, 1961) pp. 19ff and 62ff and Engelberg, The Vast Design, pp. 184-190. Both are concerned with Pater's part in the Romantic tradition of the image as something at once both static and dynamic.

divorces itself quite radically from Pater's, despite Yeats's acceptance of Pater as the first modern poet in his Preface to the Oxford Book of Modern Poetry. For Pater, time is always a series of discrete moments; moment is radically divided from moment and art's function is to make each as intense and valuable as possible as it passes:

> Every one of those impressions is the impression of the individual in his isolation, each mind keeping as a solitary prisoner its own dream of the world. Analysis goes a step farther still, and assures us that those impressions of the individual mind to which, for each one of us, experience dwindles down, are in perpetual flight; that each of them is limited by time, and that as time is infinitely divisible, each of them is infinitely divisible also; all that is actual in it being a single moment, gone while we try to apprehend it, of which it may be more truly said that it has ceased to be than that it is.[1]

The isolation of aesthetic experience, the fact that it occurs always as an element in an individual consciousness whose experiences cannot be shared with any other consciousness is common both to Pater's 'sensationalism' and to associationism, but, in the latter, moments are not divorced one from another. Moments flow from one another along a train of thought which is united by a certain emotional tone or by a set of similar ideas: intensity is never, therefore, the intensity of a single moment, but the intensity of moments which one moment can attach to itself by association. As Jerome Hamilton Buckley puts it: 'Convinced that his own fleeting experience was for him the one reality in a crumbling world, the Decadent lived wholly in time.'[2] This is true, but true only if one conceives of time as being able to be mechanically atomised: the decadent accepts the mechanical, material world of the scientists, only to reject its

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1 Walter Pater, The Renaissance (Fontana: London, 1961), pp. 221-222.

2 Jerome Hamilton Buckley, The Triumph of Time (Oxford University Press: London, 1967).

implications in the elevation of his own consciousness to a position of ultimate value. That consciousness is itself momentary, however, whereas for Yeats consciousness is always a continuous substratum which is characterised neither by the atomism of time nor by the atomism of its individual units of memory. Consciousness - and this is where Berkeley's philosophy was to prove so congenial to him - is always something over and above its actual contents or its actual location.

The great metaphysical problem of associationist theory lay in the difficulty in establishing what the mind was apart from its sensations and associations: what, in other words, the remembered units that provided the associative response were contained within. Unless there were some active element apart from the images themselves what force brought the images into consciousness or awareness? Hume talks as though this occurred under the impulse of some active energy belonging to images themselves, a kind of gravity operating between them, but with no reference to consciousness since there was no consciousness except the images. Bergson puts the problem in these terms in Matière et Mémoire, a work which reveals the extent to which Yeats's preoccupations in the first decade of the century, though expressed sometimes in eccentric forms, were close to the central intellectual debates of the time.

> La véritable question est de savoir comment s'opère la sélection entre une infinité de souvenirs qui tous ressemblent, par quelque côté à la perception présente, et pourquoi un seul d'entre eux, - celui-ci plutôt que celui-là, - émerge à la lumière de la conscience. Mais parce qu'il a érigé les idées et les images en entités indépendantes, flottant, à la manière des atomes d'Epicure, dans une espace intérieure, se rapproachant, s'accrochant

> entre elles quand le hasard les amène dans la sphère d'attraction les unes des autres.[1]

Associationism cannot justify the appearance of one rather than another memory because it recognizes no force to which these memories are attached. The realisation of one rather than another must thus be a random process, an accident which debases the whole theory, since associationism was intended to account for the manner and order of the appearance in consciousness of any image. However, Bergson is unable to answer the problem by positing a continuous consciousness, because consciousness, for Bergson as much as Hume, is nothing more than the images of which it is constituted. What Bergson does is to make time itself the supporting sub-stratum to which other things are attached: 'But as regards the physical life unfolding beneath the symbols which conceal it, we readily perceive that time is just the stuff it is made of.'[2] By making time a 'stuff' ('étoffe') Bergson does away with the need for a consciousness as a separate entity placed in relation to the world around it and to its own contents.

> There is, moreover, no stuff more resistant nor more substantial. For our duration is not merely one instant replacing another; if it were, there would never be anything but the present - no prolonging of the past into

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1 Henri Bergson, Matière et Mémoire (Paris, 1910), p. 179. For a more recent discussion of the issues raised by associationism and Bergson's theories see Jean-Paul Sartre, Imagination, trans. Forrest Williams (Ann Arbor, 1972), originally published Paris, 1936. Sartre discusses both associationist and Bergsonian conceptions of the image, chapters 3 and 4, in the course of developing his own phenomenological account. As Engelberg points out (Vast Design, p. 131) Yeats read Bergson carefully and is obviously concerned with the creation of not dissimilar solutions to similar problems: the agreement, however, is not so total as Engelberg suggests.

2 Henri Bergson, Creative Evolution, trans. Arthur Mitchell (Macmillan: London, 1911), p. 4.

> the actual, no evolution, no concrete duration. Duration is the continuous progress of the past which gnaws into the future and which swells it as it advances. And as the past grows without ceasing, so also there is no limit to its preservation. Memory, as we have tried to prove, is not a faculty of putting away recollections in a drawer, or of inscribing them in a register. There is no register, no drawer ... In reality, the past is preserved by itself, automatically. In its entirety, probably, it follows us at every instant; all that we have felt, thought and willed from our earliest infancy is there, leaning over the present which is about to join it, pressing against the portals of consciousness that would fain leave it out. The cerebral mechanism is arranged just so as to drive back into the unconscious almost the whole of this past, and to admit beyond the threshold only that which can cast light on the present situation or further the action now being prepared - in short only that which can give <u>useful</u> work.[1]

Such a theory would obviously have elements in common with Yeats's own: the conception of an unconscious which retains all past experiences is a common inheritance from Coleridge and German Romanticism; the fact that the past is always there, in the present, would appeal to Yeats on the basis of its destruction of temporal categories, but I do not think that Yeats would have agreed that 'the past is preserved by itself, automatically.' As I attempted to show in the last chapter, the past, for Yeats, is a social construction: the past is not just what has happened and has been automatically recorded - the past has to be achieved with effort. The unconscious does not only contain what we have previously experienced, it contains also things which we have never experienced, but which are part of some primal memory of the race. The ontological past which Bergson describes is, for Yeats, historically relative:

> Before the modern movement, and while it was but new, the ordinary man, whether he could read and write or not, was ready to welcome great literature ... But to-day we come to understand great literature by a long preparation, or

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1 Bergson, <u>Creative Evolution</u>, p. 5.

> by some accident of nature, for we only begin to understand life when our minds have been purified of temporary interests by study.[1]

The past, for Yeats, is not just what has happened to us, or the accumulation of our experiences, but what we have consciously learned in order to replace the accidents of our personal life with something more permanent. Not all of the past comes automatically to be part of our present: the difficulty with Bergson's theory is that it makes the present too much dependent on the past and the past not sufficiently dependent on the present. For Yeats, the past upon which the present is dependent is not the personal past, but the social or collective past; the present upon which the past is dependent is a present of choice and decision as regards what aspects of that collective past one will make active in one's own life:

> No new man has ever plucked the rose, or found that trysting place (of time and eternity - CC), for he could but come to the understanding of himself, to the mastery of unlocking words, after long frequenting of the great Masters, hardly without ancestral memory of the like.[2]

The ancestral memory is impossible under Bergson's scheme, the socially defined relevance of the past irrelevant. For Bergson the past is always part of the present, it comes with us, it is never really left in the past. For Yeats the past is always the past, but images of the past can also be present: it is not that they are always present, it is that they are both past and present; thus do they defy what in Bergson is the only reality - time. What Bergson is concerned with is the survival of the past as a part of the present: what Yeats is concerned with is the survival of the past as both past and present. The image may be present to us, but it is present as part of the past and so frees us from what Bergson condemns

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1 'First Principles', Ex., pp. 151-152.

2 Yeats, 'Poetry and Tradition, E&I, pp. 255-6.

us to, the present becoming the future, rolling along under the impetus of the past. The writer, according to Yeats in 'Poetry and Tradition', 'alone can know the ancient records and be like some mystic courtier who has stolen the keys from the girdle of Time, and can wander where it pleases him amid the splendours of ancient Courts.'[1] And the reason for the writer's ability in this respect is precisely that, unlike the mind in Bergson's description, the past is not present to him only in so far as it can 'give useful work'. The past, not the future, opens to Yeats's artist as infinite possibility. For Bergson, the past appears in the present only under the influence of present needs and developments; for Yeats the past appears in the present as significant exactly in so far as its relevance is not known and it is able to question the relevances of the present.

Bergson's discussion was probably useful to Yeats in helping him to realise his own conception of the relation between past and present, but like Pater's its connection with Yeats's actual thought is probably contextual rather than essential. Bergson could offer a picture of how the past could be cumulative in its influence on the present, and thus could offer a solution to the atomism of Pater, but Bergson could not account for the difference between certain kinds of past. If Bergson's theory was right, the past for each individual was equally retained and equally relevant to the present: Yeats insists that the retention of the past is not automatic, but an achievement of social ordering and individual effort. Such a statement as this from his 'Journal' would cease to be possible had Yeats fully concurred with Bergson:

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1 Yeats, 'Poetry and Tradition', E&I, p. 253.

> All empty souls tend to extreme opinions. It is only in those who have built up a rich world of memories and habits of thought that extreme opinions affront the sense of probability.[1]

For Yeats the past is never given; like all beauty it is a product of effort which can only fulfil itself by ceasing from effort and allowing what has been achieved by effort to come into its own reality. It is part of Yeats's faith that what is real, both with regard to the individual and with regard to the universe, is itself eternal; it may happen in time - how else could we know of it? - but it is not of time. Time is neither the ultimate destruction, as in Pater, nor the ultimate preserver, as in Bergson. Time is the condition through which the eternal is possible, but only if the continuities in time, the relationships which time allows us to develop, are themselves achieved by us. Only if individual experience is able to form itself within the pattern of some broader experience which preserves more than the personal past, can eternity make itself a part of the present. The audience, and thus a certain kind of social structure, is essential to this process - as I argued in the previous chapter - but that does not define what it is that one achieves, that does not define the nature of the eternity which one seeks. It does, however, set the conditions of the achievement: if we are trapped within time, even within our own time, within our personal past, the eternal is no longer possible. But the eternal is possible because in art we participate in something which is conditioned neither by the time of its creation nor by the time of its reception; or, by being conditioned by both, insists that it transcends both. If this is

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1 Yeats, Memoirs, p. 151.

not the case we can never receive a communication from art, because it will always be only a product of our own conditions, a reflection of ourselves. If we have entered fully into a work of art, we have not merely made contact between two conditional existences, we have entered into something which transcends both, into eternity, but an eternity produced out of both times.

It is this which makes Yeats's theory different from both Pater's and Bergson's: it implies a spiritual possibility which is open to neither of the others. It is also this which makes essential one of the most persistent elements in Yeats's critical writings from about 1906 onwards - Yeats's quarrel with the journalist. The journalist appears insistently in Yeats's prose after this date as an antithetical force to the artist, though one who, because such a recent innovation, cannot become an archetypal opponent. The journalist is, of course, also a worker with words, but his commitment is to opinions, generalities, to all that traps man within limits and divorces him from the eternal. If the artist overcomes time by creating something that partakes of eternity, the journalist submits to time and writes to a deadline. The time in which the journalist lives is, however, not so different from the time of Pater or Bergson: it is a time of the moment's intensity, and where the past is relevant only in so far as it is useful to the present. The newspaper preserves the past by recording the present in print, but it also destroys it because it consigns the present into the past as a set of files to be examined only in the light of present needs. Thus Yeats links journalism with the art form in the modern world which has denied the spirituality of existence: 'Realism is created for the common people and was always their particular delight, and it is the delight

to-day of all those whose minds, educated by school-masters and newspapers, are without memory of beauty and emotional subtlety.'[1] The memory of beauty is a two handed phrase for Yeats, for it also implies the essential nature, as we have seen it, of the aesthetic experience, which can only exist on the basis of memory. The newspapers are unconcerned with beauty because they have no place for any of its preconditions, memory, emotion or the suspension of the mind from practical necessities:

> Many who have to work hard have always made time for this reverie, but it comes more easily to the leisured, and in this it is like a broken heart, which is, a Dublin newspaper assured us lately, impossible to a busy man.[2]

Having no place for art's preconditions, the newspapers are gradually destroying the possibility of art in the modern world. Yeats takes the journalist as the essential propagator of the kind of world which was breaking down the relationship between the artist and his audience, and in so doing driving art out of existence:

> We have no longer in any country a literature as great as the literature of the old world, and that is because the newspapers, all kinds of second-rate books, the pre-occupation of men with all kinds of practical changes, have driven the living imagination out of the world.[3]

The 'living imagination' is a term which makes it sound as though Yeats is talking about a faculty of the mind; but the living imagination for Yeats is not a faculty of the individual mind, it is a possibility created by the communal mind, as I hope the last chapter has demonstrated. The newspapers destroy the living imagination by cutting men off from contact with the past and so destroying the continuity between past and present which is the essence of living. The process of relating the two is not an automatic one - which is why it can be destroyed by newspapers.

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1 Yeats, 'Certain Noble Plays of Japan', E&I, p. 227.

2 Yeats, 'First Principles', Ex., p. 141.

3 Yeats, 'First Principles', Ex., p. 148.

Yet it is only by relating the two that art can ascend into the eternal, its proper sphere, and one that the journalist never seeks: 'The imaginative writer differs from the saint in that he identifies himself - to the neglect of his own soul, alas! - with the soul of the world and frees himself from all that is impermanent in that soul, an ascetic not of women and wine, but of the newspapers.'[1] To free himself from all that is impermanent in the world soul the artist must have some kind of knowledge by which permanent and impermanent can be distinguished. Such knowledge is possible only through memory, through an awareness of past and present which will reveal the unchanging from the changing. For the newspaper everything is a part of the present, but it is only in an awareness of the continuity between past and present that the eternal can be recognised, thereby allowing the achievement of what Yeats describes in 'Discoveries' as the essential project of art, 'to ascend out of common interests, the thoughts of the newspapers, of the market-place, of men of science.'[2]

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1 Yeats, 'Discoveries', E&I, p. 286.

2 Yeats, 'Discoveries', E&I, p. 272. The many references to newspapers and journalism in Yeats's writings reveal his deep concern about the impact of the form of the newspaper on the consciousness of the modern age; Yeats is one of the precursors of the work that has been done more recently by Ong and McLuhan, work that has evidently emerged from a common area of concern among writers and critics of the first half of the century. Compare Yeats's thought, for instance, with Walter Benjamin on Proust: 'Man's inner concerns do not have their issueless private character by nature. They do so only when he is increasingly unable to assimilate the data of the world around him by way of experience. Newspapers constitute one of the many evidences of such an inability. If it were the intention of newspapers to have the reader assimilate the information it supplies as part of his own experience, it would not achieve its purpose. But its intention is just the opposite, and it is achieved: to isolate what happens from the realm in which it could affect the experience of the reader. The principles of journalistic information (freshness of news, brevity, comprehensibility, and, above all, lack of connection between the individual news items) contribute (to this) ... Another reason for the isolation of information from experience is that the newspaper does not enter 'tradition'. Newspapers appear in large editions. Few readers can boast of any information which another reader may require of him.' (Walter Benjamin, Illuminations, trans. Harry Zohn (Fontana: London, 1970), pp. 160-161.)

The quarrel with the journalist becomes important to Yeats, as I said, about 1906 or 1907,[1] at that point in his development when he was forced into seeing art as dependent not only on a relation between time and eternity, but on the developments occurring within time which conditioned that relation. The quarrel becomes important when the nature of the temporal world cannot merely be assumed - and as quickly as possible dismissed - but when it must be fought for. Yeats realises at this time that the power of words can be used to defeat the ultimate purpose of words; the journalist can deprive the artist of the past, locking the meanings of words into present circumstances alone, and thereby cutting off the apprehension of the transcendent. Without the associative connections that have their roots in the past, the eternal is unreachable.

Yeats's conception of time, therefore, distinguishes itself from both Bergson's and Pater's: time itself is, or can be made, in our awareness of it atomistic, fragmented moment from moment, but consciousness subsisting through time and not suffering such atomisation can transcend that fragmentation by creating continuity between past and present. The work of art is not, as Pater would have it, something that happens in an intense moment, but happens in a process in which the mind, passing into the future under the stimulus of the given - the future, that is, as seen from the moment of the work of art's appearance in consciousness - reaches back into the past to create meaning. By this paradoxical union time is overcome: one is beyond time because the experience is not bounded by the atom of time in which it has its source. The process whereby this

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1 The importance of this date to a change in Yeats's conception of time will be further argued in relation to the poems, see below, chapter ?

is achieved is not, however, automatic: it can only be achieved on the basis of an effort, a communal effort, towards the retention of a memory which exceeds the bounds of the personal. Only in the context of such a memory can the experiencing consciousness participate in a pattern of relationships which is not defined by the accidents of his own existence.

The outline of this schema remained constant in Yeats's thinking, though he would sometimes stress one aspect of it more than others; the supernatural basis of memory in the peasant community which he asserted in the 'nineties gave way to a more historical view in the period between 1905 and 1915, the period when he began to propagandise the virtues of aristocracy, and this in turn gave way - or perhaps the two were synthesised - to a community of the supernatural, of the great dead in the great memory. From the communal memory of whatever kind the poet drew inspiration for a transcendence of time through the process of time. That transcendence, of course, is achieved through the symbol, which develops its power in proportion to its length of existence in the common memory and which the poet inherits from its primitive source in shamanism:

> Men who are imaginative writers today may well have preferred to influence the imagination of others more directly in past times. Instead of learning their craft with paper and pen they may have sat for hours imagining themselves to be stocks and stones and beasts of the wood, till the images were so vivid that the passers-by became but a part of the imagination of the dreamer, and wept or laughed or ran away as he would have them. Have not poetry and music arisen, as it seems, out of the sounds the enchanters made to help their imagination to enchant, to charm, to bind with a spell themselves and the passers-by? These very words, a chief part of all praises of music or poetry, still cry to us their origin. And just as the musician or the poet enchants and charms and binds with a spell his own mind when he would enchant the minds of others, so did the enchanter create or reveal for himself as well as for others the supernatural artist or genius, the seeming transitory mind made out of many minds ...[1]

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1 'Magic', E&I, p. 43.

The doubling back upon itself of this passage, leading from the writers of today to the mages of the past, from the mages to the writers of today and back again, emphasises the concept of the artist as magician, as a preserver of miraculous rites, which was part of the common inheritance both of the Romantic artist and the 'symbolisme' which Yeats had come in contact with through Arthur Symons.[1] The extent of Yeats's inheritance from the French has, of course, been a matter of much dispute[2] and, as Edward Engelberg suggests, the exact indebtedness will probably never be established,[3] but what is common to both the French tradition and to the British Romantic tradition is the idea of the poem as a revelation[4] rather than a communication: art experienced properly reveals the world as it had not been known before (Blake), or what lies beyond the world (Mallarmé), or what lies in the depths of the self (Rimbaud). The poem is the means of inducing an experience rather than the conveying of an attitude or the construction of an object. Of course, all poetry does induce experiences because to read it is to experience it, to have, at the very least, an aesthetic experience. But Romantic poetry of this kind is not concerned with aesthetic experiences except insofar as they lead to experiences which lie beyond poetry, though poetry is the surest

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1 Autobiographies, p. 318 ff.

2 See William York Tindall, 'The Symbolism of W.B. Yeats' in Yeats: A Collection of Critical Essays, ed. John Unterecker (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1963), pp. 43-54.

3 Engelberg, The Vast Design, p. 109.

4 See 'William Blake and his Illustrations to the Divine Comedy', E&I, p. 116: 'the one [symbol] is a revelation, the other [allegory] an amusement.'

medium of the achievement. These experiences are essentially visionary, like the experiences the mage induces in passers by. The poem as act and means which this tradition offers is supported by the associationist psychology and its attendant aesthetic: the poem is the stimulus of an experience which will be a revelation to the reader.

Thus it is not the content of Yeats's symbols which we need to examine in order to understand the nature of his symbolism, it is the structure of the experience within which symbols are formed and have their effect. Edward Engelberg tried to do this when he distinguished, however tentatively, between 'coalescing' and 'exfoliating' symbols.[1] However, the distinction collapses into the unitary structure of the associationist principle for the coalescing symbol, an object which gradually assumes symbolic meanings in the course of a poem, can only be symbolic because the reader's mind passes from the given point in the poem back through the previous elements of the poem to find the objects significance. Its symbolic quality may be limited in that it has only those associations embodied in the poem, but this is only quantitatively different from the exfoliating symbol which sends one back to any number of associations for its significance. In fact, in most cases the two can hardly be separated, since each poem demands both a general level of association and at the same time attempts to impose limits on association through the development of the particular associations in the poem. Thus Yeats's tower has general associations - Yeats offered Il Penseroso's tower, Shelley's towers and Samuel Palmer's engravings - which are delimited by the actual use of the tower in the poems, its unfinished

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1 Engelberg, The Vast Design, p. 112.

top for instance. The dialectic between exfoliation and coalescence is maintained by these two aspects of the tower, the opening out of significances performed by one being closed by the significances of the others. Exfoliation and coalescence are poetic tactics in the approach to the symbol, not definitions of the symbol achieved.

Northrop Frye has offered us a different way of taking Yeats's symbolism. In a too little regarded essay Frye offers the following explanation of the process of reading a poem:

> In reading any poem we have to know at least two languages: the language the poet is writing and the language of poetry itself. The former exists in the words the poet uses, the latter in the images and ideas which the words express. And just as the words of the language are a set of verbal conventions, so the imagery of poetry is a set of symbolic conventions. This set of symbolic conventions differs from a symbolic system, such as a religion or metaphysic, in being concerned, not with content, but with a mode of apprehension.[1]

This is an interesting proposition and one that Frye put subsequently to much use, but it is not without its difficulties. The notion of a set of symbolic conventions which allow us to read a poem in a parallel sense to our reading of the language of the poem demands that behind the symbols there exists something else to which they refer. The purpose of symbolising conventions is to create a common set of terms to encompass a shared set of experiences: but the poetic convention is not a set of things symbolising other things, they <u>are</u> our experiences. Symbolist poets may have used symbols to point towards some other essence lying behind the symbols, but it is not an essence we can know apart from the symbols as we can know a desk apart from the English word 'desk' and the French 'bureau'. Meaning and symbol are identical, not conventionally

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1 Northrop Frye, 'Yeats and the Language of Symbolism', <u>Toronto Quarterly</u>, xvii, 1947-8, pp. 1-17.

and arbitrarily linked as words are to their referents. Frye attempts to embody this distinction by suggesting that poetic symbols are not concerned with content, but with a mode of apprehension. This is, in a sense, true, but it is true only by a prior acceptance of a certain kind of metaphysic, the metaphysic that Frye wants to examine in the Romantic poets. He defines the symbols of the Romantic poets as

> a Kantian language, by which I do not mean that it is founded on Kant, but that it implies a popularised metaphysics with predominantly Kantian features. The Romantic poet splits reality into a world of experience and a world of perception, the former world, Kant's noumenon, being interpreted by poetry, and the latter or phenomenal world being the only object of rational knowledge.[1]

The distinction which he holds the poets to have made between a world of experience and a world of perception is exactly the distinction that he has drawn into his own theory of the two languages: the world of experience corresponds to symbolic language, the world of perception to ordinary language; the former provides a 'mode of apprehension' and the latter knowledge of the world. Insofar as it applies to these poets it is, therefore, a self-justifying proposition. It is also, I would maintain, a destructive proposition since it separates so decisively the language of art from our knowledge of the world. This separation is one that is, I think, <u>not</u> borne out by Romantic artists to the extent that Frye maintains: Yeats does not believe in a divorce between symbolic and scientific reality, he believes that science has unjustifiably contracted the nature of the world to the limits of its powers of experimentation. Thus his long series of letters with Sturge Moore about Ruskin's cat and the possibilities of photographing thought

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1 Frye, 'Yeats and the Language of Symbolism', <u>Toronto Quarterly</u> xvii, 1947-8, p. 8.

images.[1] The divorce between the two is not, as in Kant, an essential part of the structure of our consciousness, but an unfortunate historical accident which has to be put right.

What Frye's original statement of the division ignores is that language itself is not a 'set of verbal conventions': verbal conventions are the matrix that relates words to one another in a language, but the language itself is also a set of symbolic conventions: it is by the process of symbolising that sounds and shapes on the page come to be related to objects in the world or experiences in the mind. Of course, language goes beyond that: there is nothing symbolised by 'and' or 'if', and these are a part of the verbal conventions by which language operates, but language itself is a symbolising process. This is brought out by Ogden and Richards who reverse entirely the terminology of Frye:

> The symbolic use of words is statement, the recording, the support, the organization and the communication of references. The emotive use of words is a more simple matter, it is the use of words to express or excite feelings and attitudes ... The best test of whether our use of words is essentially symbolic or emotive is the question - "Is this true or false in the ordinary strict scientific sense?" If this question is relevant then the use is symbolic, if it is clearly irrelevant then we have an emotive utterance.[2]

Arthur Symons had already made this point in his discussion of symbolism in The Symbolist Movement in Literature:

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1 W.B. Yeats and T. Sturge Moore: Their Correspondence 1901-1937, ed. Ursula Bridge (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1953). See p. 60 ff. Yeats writes in February 1926 about the photographing of images: 'The other person whose photographs of thought I spoke of was Commandant Darget, who is spoken of with respect by Richet. Richet himself speaks of the impossibility of drawing any distinct line between objective and subjective images ... The distinction between objective and subjective images is to any student of this subject obsolete.' (p.6).

2 C.K. Ogden and I.A. Richards, The Meaning of Meaning (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner, 1923), p. 257.

> Without symbolism there can be no literature; indeed, not even language. What are words themselves but symbols, almost as arbitrary as the letters which compose them, mere sounds of the voice to which we have agreed to give certain significations, as we have agreed to translate these sounds by those combinations of letters? Symbolism began with the first words uttered by the first man, as he named every living thing.[1]

Frye, of course, means by symbolism a particular literary technique, that of poetic discourse, but in marking it off from other forms of discourse he destroys its continuity with the language we normally speak. The 'symbolic conventions' of poetry are not separate from the symbolic conventions of language itself, but an intensification or extension of them.

In making one thing stand for another language is, in its very essence, symbolic: once that structure is established, however, extensions can occur within it by making different things in the world relate to each other through relating them within the language system: we construct metaphors in other words. Metaphor has increasingly come to be seen as the very essence of poetic technique, but it is equally the essence of language development. Wittgenstein once suggested that language was like a ladder, each rung a metaphor which, when we stepped up from it, dropped away, so that we stood always on an eminence we took for reality but which was, in fact, an illusion created by long unnoticed metaphors in the very structure of our thought. Graham Martin sums up the integral nature of metaphor with our normal patterns of language:

> But is 'leg' (for the leg of a table) a metaphoric usage? ... There are all sorts of gradations between the use of 'leg' as referring to a human leg, and, say, the 'leg' of a journey. Now it is perfectly possible to differentiate between the use

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1 Arthur Symons, The Symbolist Movement in Literature (London: Heinemann, 1899), p. 3.

> of 'leg' for a human leg and, say, a wooden leg. For everyone will agree that the criteria, that is the connotations, are different in the two cases. But how is one to come to a decision whether both or one of these uses is 'literal'? And this is the problem. The usual definitions of literality are irritatingly vague: they assert that an expression is literal if it is normal, or 'proper'; or they talk of an 'essential difference' between the two referents, the name of one of which is being applied to the other. But what is an 'essential difference'?[1]

To see poetry as separate from normal discourse, as a special kind of discourse is a dangerous division of our language and its fabric. Of course poets have constructed that division often in discussing poetry, and none more than the 'symboliste' poets to whom Yeats has been linked, but the division is not actually of the kind envisaged by Frye because there is no grammar of their poetic language: it is language become object or act and not a matter of referential communication even at the level of 'a mode of apprehension'. What Frye is offering us is a grammar of conventional symbols which will be equivalent to a grammar of language, or the conventions established by a dictionary. Such a grammar is possible for certain areas of symbolism because they work within a system which we know to be the relevant context for the symbol's use in a particular poem, but it is a very dull kind of symbolism. It is a symbolism which, like the leg of a table, has ceased to carry any metaphoric force and has, therefore, ceased to be exploratory.

It is the exploratory nature of the symbolism which distinguishes, I think, poetic from religious or metaphysical uses of symbolism.[2] In

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1 Graham Dunstan Martin, Language, Truth and Poetry (Edinburgh: University Press, 1975), p. 203. Cf. Yeats, 'The Symbolism of Poetry', E&I, p. 156. 'We may call this metaphorical writing, but it is better to call it symbolical writing, because metaphors are not profound enough to be moving: when they are not symbols.'

2 The differences are not so great, I think, as Frye makes them out to be and as I accept them as being for the purposes of argument in this paragraph. See Metaphor and Symbol, ed. L.C. Knights and Basil Cottle (London: Butterworth Scientific Publications, 1960), particularly F.W. Dillistone, 'The Function of Symbols in Religious Experience' and L.C. Knights, 'Idea and Symbol; Some Hints from Coleridge'.

either of these the symbolic language is used to close the world, even perhaps to enclose the mystery of the world. The symbol channels its energies in a single direction, towards a single conclusion. The end towards which the symbolic language works has been defined in advance of its use. Yeats sometimes talks as though this were the case with his poetic symbols, as though the writing of symbolic poetry were the same as the submission to a pre-existing symbolic framework, particularly a religious one:

> All art is sensuous, but when a man puts only his contemplative nature and his more vague desires into his art, the senuous images through which it speaks become broken, fleeting, uncertain, or are chosen for their distance from general experience, and all grows insubstantial and fantastic ... If we are to sojourn there that world must grow consistent with itself, emotion must be related to emotion by a system of ordered images, as in the Divine Comedy. It must grow to be symbolic, that is, for the soul can only achieve a distinct separated life where any related objects at once distinguish and arouse its energies in their fullness.[1]

The emotions towards which art is directed are thus given their structure, their relations from some pre-existing, non-aesthetic structure. Thus, Yeats continues, he wishes for some group of believers to which Shelley could have been attached to give substance to his imagery by making it truly symbolic - i.e. ordered:

> A little crowd had been sufficient, and I would have had Shelley a sectary that his revelation might display the only sufficient evidence of religion, miracle. All symbolic art should arise out of a real belief, and that it cannot do so in this age proves that this age is a road and not a resting-place for the imaginative arts.[2]

However, the symbol which is validated by a 'little crowd' is opaque to those not privy to the nature of the belief. The order is achieved at

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1 'Discoveries', E&I, p. 293.

2 E&I, p. 294.

no cost to symbol's essential vagueness of meaning, since the closure towards which the symbol points is unknown to its aesthetic if not its religious audience.

The vagueness of meaning which I mentioned is the quality which defines the exploratory virtue of the symbol. This vagueness is not something to be condemned or something to be got round by a sufficient elucidation: it is the necessary quality of the symbol's poetic - and human - significance. Graham Martin suggests a gradual scale of metaphoric attribution which connects ordinary discourse with the high level discourse of the symbol:

> ... as we move from faded metaphor through analytic metaphor to synoptic metaphor, and finally to that most complex of all images, the symbol, we are moving from a situation where the connotations[1] are single, or few, or to some extent ennumerated, and where indeed many of them may be unknown or unconscious.[2]

The religious symbol stands for something which we cannot perceive but which we have intellectually or spiritually completed: a religious symbol which we no longer or cannot actually believe in offers itself as an uncompleted connection with something lying beyond its own existence. The sense of something lying beyond its own existence, and a desire for its closure, is what Yeats is asking of Shelley, but in his earlier essay on 'The Philosophy of Shelley's Poetry' he had put the case slightly differently, using terms which suggest the gradations adopted by Martin:

> One finds in his poetry, besides innumerable images that have not the definiteness of symbols, many images that are certainly symbols, and as the years went by he began to use these with a more and more deliberately symbolic purpose. I imagine that when he wrote his earlier poems he allowed the subconscious life to lay its hands so firmly on the rudder of his imagination that he was little conscious of the abstract meaning of the images that rose in what seemed the idleness of his mind.[3]

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1 Martin uses 'connotation' to refer to both the parts of an object by which we identify it as being that object - trunk, roots, branches of a tree - as well as to the associations which the whole object creates in our mind. The mechanism of metaphor and symbol which he outlines depends on both.

2 Martin, Language, Truth and Poetry, p. 222-3.

3 'The Philosophy of Shelley's Poetry', E&I, p. 78.

The gradation between image and symbol which Yeats offers us is not one of increasingly ennumerable connotations, but of more specificity, the specificity being provided by the intellectual knowledge of the symbol's significance. The reverberations of the symbol in the mind are a function of the infinite which it specifies, a religious infinity, and not of the multiple associations it generates. The symbol encloses within it our sense of awe at a transcendent reality and it is that unfinishable, unfathomable awe - in the best manner of the sublime[1] - which gives the symbol its poetic power and reverberation in the mind.

The desire to close the symbol is a desire, I would argue, which is in conflict with its real poetic purpose: it is a version of Frye's language analogy which sets conventional meanings on symbolic language. The conventional meanings are there, but they are not the meaning of this symbol in this poem: they are what the symbol draws into the orbit of our experience of the symbol. Yeats's desire to close the symbol is revealed in his adherence to occult groups and in his use of their symbology in his poems, so that specific meanings can be given to his symbols on the basis of equations within an occult system; it is revealed in A Vision which performs a private version of the same process. But Yeats seemed to realise the balance that had to be maintained between the closing of the image by a system and its essential openness of association: his scepticism about the extent to which A Vision could be held true, the secrecy with which his occult symbols are shrouded show that the poems as aesthetic works for an audience need not be delimited by the sources of their symbols. A Vision is a preliminary scaffolding towards the poetic structure, not

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1 Cf. the already quoted passage from Thomas Carlyle, Sartor Resartus, p. 175: 'In the symbol proper, what we can call a Symbol, there is ever, more or less distinctly and directly, some embodiment and revelation of the Infinite; the Infinite is made to blend itself with the Finite, to stand visible, and as it were, attainable there.'

an explanation of it - 'metaphors for poetry'.[1]

The closed system which Yeats's poetry is always tending towards is closed exactly to the extent that it denies the associative process in the reader. The tendency towards closure is, however, matched by a tendency towards openness that belongs to the other pole of the symbol's possibilities - suggestion. Of course, closure and suggestion are not incompatible: what is closed for one mind, seeing in the symbol some specific abstract meaning, is openness for another, seeking for meanings to which he has no key. Yeats uses the latter criterion in 'The Symbolism of Poetry':

> The scientific movement brought with it a literature which was always tending to lose itself in externalities of all kinds, in opinion, in declamation, in picturesque writing, in word-painting, or in what Mr Symons has called an attempt 'to build brick and mortar inside the covers of a book': and now the writers have begun to dwell upon the element of evocation, of suggestion, upon what we call the symbolism in great writers.[2]

Yeats's reference to Symons in this passage poses a problem in the interpretation of the terms 'evocation' and 'suggestion', because Symons's essays in 'The Symbolist Movement in Literature' present us with two distinct and different kinds of symbolism. One is a symbolism based on religious transcendence and directed towards a revelation of a 'noumenon', the other is a symbolism which is self-directed, which attempts to pass from poet to reader an emotion which must not be falsified by the pre-existing structures of language and perception within which we normally operate. The latter form of the symbolist technique can be seen most clearly in Symons's description of Mallarmé's poetry:

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1 'The Symbolism of Poetry', E&I, p. 155.

> The word, chosen as he chooses it, is for him a liberating principle, by which the spirit is extracted from matter; takes form, perhaps assumes immortality. Thus an artificiality, even, in the use of words, that seeming artificiality which comes from using words as if they had never been used before, that chimerical search after the virginity of language, is but the paradoxical sign of an extreme discontent with even the best of their service ... To evoke, by some elaborate, instantaneous magic of language, without the formality of an after all impossible description; to be, rather than to express: that is what Mallarmé has consistently, and from the first, sought in prose and verse ...
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> I think I understand, though I cannot claim his own authority for my supposition, the way in which Mallarmé wrote verse, and the reason why it became more and more abstruse, more and more unintelligible. Remember his principle: that to name is to destroy, to suggest is to create ... Every word seems like a desecration, seems, the clearer it is, to throw back the original sensation farther into the darkness. But, guided always by the rhythm, which is the executive soul (as, in Aristotle's definition, the soul is the form of the body), words come slowly, one by one, shaping the message. Imagine the poem already written down, at least composed. In its very imperfection, it is clear, it shows the links by which it has been riveted together; the whole process of its construction can be studied. Now most writers would be content; but with Mallarmé the work has only begun. In the final result there must be no sign of the making, there must be only the thing made. He works it over, word by word ... By the time the poem has reached, as it seems to him, a flawless unity, the steps of the progress have been only too effectually effaced; and while the poet, who has seen the thing from the beginning, still sees the relation of point to point, the reader, who comes to it only in its final stage, finds himself in a not unnatural bewilderment.[1]

I have quoted this passage at length because it conforms so closely to Yeats's favourite essay by Hallam: the obscurity of the poetry is a function of the reader's inability - in Mallarmé's case a deliberately contrived situation - to follow the links in the associative process which would justify the presentation of material in the poem.[2] Instead of the

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1 Arthur Symons, The Symbolist Movement in Literature, pp. 131-134.

2 Cf. Eliot's introduction to his translation of St-Jean Perse's Anabasis (London: Faber, 1959), pp. 9-10: 'Any obscurity in the poem, on first reading, is due to the suppression of "links in the chain" of explanatory and connecting matter, and not to incoherence, or to the love of cryptogram ... The reader has to allow the images to fall into his memory successively without questioning the reasonableness of each at the moment; so that, at the end, a total effect is produced. Such selection of a sequence of images has nothing chaotic about it. There is a logic of the imagination as well as a logic of concepts.'

unknowable but suggestible transcendent we have to reach towards the unknowable interiority of the poet's own associative processes. Transcendental and psychological symbolism are essentially different in kind because of the degree of closure which is possible: the transcendental symbolism can be closed by the specifying of an intellectually verifiable meaning, some abstract definition, whereas the psychological symbol can only be closed by a leap across the abyss between the reader's mind and the poet's, an intuited perception of the emotion lying behind the symbol. Yeats was to turn away, however, from the purity of personal association demanded by Hallam and embodied by Mallarmé, though as always he left nothing behind: everything would be gathered together into a higher synthesis. His retreat from Hallam's position is recorded in 'Estrangement':

> The doctrine of what the younger Hallam called the Aesthetic School was expounded in his essay on Tennyson, and when I was a boy the importance of subject was a canon. A French poet had written of girls taking lice out of a child's hair. Henley was supposed to have founded a new modern art in the 'hospital poems', though he would not have claimed this. Hallam argued that poetry was the impression on the senses of certain very sensitive men. It was such with the pure artists, Keats and Shelley, but not so with the impure artists who, like Wordsworth, mixed up popular morality with their work. I now see that the literary element in painting, the moral element in poetry, are the means whereby the two arts are accepted into the social order and become a part of life and not things of the study and the exhibition. Supreme art is a traditional statement of certain heroic and religious truths, passed on from age to age, modified by individual genius, but never abandoned.[1]

But of course, 'Estrangement' is the high water mark of Yeats's dissatisfaction with his earlier self, and he was to rediscover the power of purity, though in a new form, with the recovery of his interest in the occult after his marriage. He has, however, refused in this passage the temptation of

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1 Ex, pp. 489-90.

Mallarmé's subjective obscurity: poetry must remain within a public domain, but if it does how can it retain the suggestive power of the symbol? The answer is contained in the same section of the diary:

> A great work of art, the Ode to a Nightingale not less than the Ode to Duty, is as rooted in the early ages as the Mass which goes back to savage folk-lore. In what temple garden did the nightingale first sing?[1]

Instead of an unknowable noumenon, or the unknowable processes of the psyche, the poem invokes an endless and, in the depths of time, unknowable past. The element of 'evocation', of 'suggestion' is historically rather than transcendentally or psychologically based, yet it can operate only through the associative process that links this individual symbol with all the symbols of the past.

Thus the associationist model provides Yeats with a double structure to his concept of the symbol. On the one hand the objects of experience are raised to symbolic level by the associations which gather around them:

> The symbols are of all kinds, for everything in heaven or earth has its association, momentous or trivial ... and one never knows what forgotten events may have plunged it, like the toadstool and the ragweed, into the great passions.[2]

> Each of these writers had come further down the stairway than those who had lived before him, but it was only with the modern poets, with Goethe and Wordsworth and Browning, that poetry gave up the right to consider all things in the world as a dictionary of types and symbols.[3]

Every object has its associations, every object can become a symbol since 'all sounds, all colours, all forms, either because of their preordained energies or because of long association, evoke indefinable yet precise emotions'.[4] On the other hand the symbol itself works not only on its

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1 Ex, p. 490.

2 'Magic', E&I, p. 50.

3 'The Autumn of the Body', E&I, p. 192.

4 'The Symbolism of Poetry', E&I, pp. 156-7.

own terms as a set of associations around an object, but recalls the whole history of the symbolic tradition. The associational context which makes an object into a symbol is intensified by being repeated on the level of symbolic apprehension itself:

> It is only by ancient symbols, by symbols that have numberless meanings besides the one or two the writer lays an emphasis on, or the half-score he knows of, that any highly subjective art can escape from the barrenness of a too conscious arrangement.[1]

> [Shelley's] poetry becomes the richer, the more emotional, and loses something of its appearance of idle fantasy when I remember that these are ancient symbols ...[2]

The associations which surround any individual object are a function of its emotional relevance to the individual, and Yeats separates these out as 'emotional symbols' suggesting that it is on this level that Shakespeare works, 'who is content with emotional symbols that he may come the nearer to our sympathy.'[3] The emotional symbol is the creation of a passionate context - 'all alluring or hateful things are symbols, although their relations with one another are too subtle to delight us fully, away from rhythm and pattern'[4] - such a context, perhaps as makes Cordelia's handkerchief into a symbol. The associations which form links between different symbols transforms them into intellectual symbols, because they then form a meaningful order. Thus Yeats's examples of 'intellectual symbols' are 'a cross or a crown of thorns'. In their original context these could only have been emotional symbols, but by being integrated into a pattern of meanings they become intellectual symbols and, having become that, they

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1 'The Philosophy of Shelley's Poetry', E&I, p. 87.

2 E&I. p. 89.

3 "The Symbolism of Poetry', E&I, p. 162.

4 E&I, p. 160.

draw forth further associations from the whole body of associations which Yeats calls the 'procession':

> It is the intellect that decides where the reader shall ponder over the procession of the symbols, and if the symbols are merely emotional, he gazes from amid the accidents and destinies of the world; but if the symbols are intellectual too, he becomes himself a part of the pure intellect, and he is himself mingled with the procession.[1]

Each symbol, therefore, involves two operations of the associative consciousness: one that imbues an object or derives from an object a set of emotional associations and one that links this into the pattern of previously established symbols. An image or object whose associations outlive its particular context grows in power the greater number of relations it establishes with other similar images, and thus 'an image that has transcended particular time and place becomes a symbol.'[2]

The context of associations in the case of emotional symbols must always be personal, must be a function of one's own memory, but if one is to escape from the purely personal there must be some memory which is greater than the personal. On one side there is the process of the communal memory, the social effort to retain the past as a part of the present, but Yeats not only felt this to be insufficient, he believed he had proof in his own experience that our individual memories are linked to a Great Memory. He describes the discovery in Autobiographies:

> Then, too, from whence come the images of the dream? Not always, I was soon persuaded, from the memory, perhaps never in trance or sleep ... A Young girl, on being sent to the same garden, heard 'the music of Heaven' from a tree, and on listening with her ear against the trunk, found that it was made by the 'continual clashing of swords'. Whence came

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1 'The Symbolism of Poetry', E&I, p. 161.

2 'The Philosophy of Shelley's Poetry', E&I, p. 80.

> that fine thought of music-making swords, that image of the garden, and many like images and thoughts? I had as yet no clear answer, but knew myself face to face with the Anima Mundi described by Platonic philosophers, and more especially in modern times by Henry More, which has a memory independent of embodied individual memories, though they constantly enrich it with their images and thoughts.[1]

Yeats's occult researches and his basically empiricist associationist psychology are here complementary. In fact, it seems to me that he would not have found the same significance in either without the help of the other, because what the occult researches provide is a macrocosmic version of the essential processes of memory upon which associationist poetry is based in the individual. The discovery of the Great Memory allowed him a means of supporting the associationist basis of art as he had learned it from Hallam without committing himself to the kind of subjectivity which had threatened Keats and Shelley and which overtook Mallarmé. The poem retains its associationist structure and retains the associationist context of its transmission without being committed to the vagaries of personal accident. The Great Memory thus provides a universal basis for the memory which is central to art: the whole universe becomes a mirror of the structure of the mind according to the associationist theory.[2]

We are, when we have discovered the Great Memory and its procession of images, no longer trapped within 'the accidents and destinies of the world', having insight into the totality of the experience of mankind. But what justification have we for assuming the relevance of that experience: why may not the contents of the Great Memory be as illusory

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1 Autobiographies, p. 262.

2 The traditions of the church were to perform the same function for Eliot in his development of the associationist theory.

to the nature of reality as Locke had supposed the individual associations of men? From universal psychology Yeats swiftly moves to ontology, and the structure of the Great Memory becomes the ontological structure of the universe. His spiritualism justifies the processes of the Great Memory, and therefore of our individual parts in it, by making its contents the very stuff of the universe - souls. He describes the situation very clearly in 'The Philosophy of Shelley's Poetry':

> Anyone who has any experience of any mystical state of the soul knows how there float up in the mind profound symbols, whose meaning, if indeed they do not delude one into the dream that they are meaningless, one does not perhaps understand for years. Not I think has any one, who has known that experience with any constancy, failed to find some day, in some old book or on some old monument, a strange or intricate image that had floated up before him, and to grow perhaps dizzy with the conviction that our little memories are but a part of some great Memory that renews the world and men's thoughts age after age, and that our thoughts are not, as we suppose, the deep, but a little foam upon the deep. Shelley understood this, as is proved by what he says of the eternity of beautiful things and of the influence of the dead, but whether he understood that the great Memory is also a dwelling-house of symbols, of images that are living souls, I cannot tell.[1]

Symbols are thus living souls in the Great Memory, part of a universe whose only reality is spiritual. Yeats's sceptical period, the period between 1905, say, and 1914 or 15, is marked by the loss of this ontological basis to the symbol as well as the loss of its social basis in a common fund of memory. There is no logical connection between the two, but they seem to be integrally bound up in Yeats's thought. The symbol based on a social community supporting a communal memory can only be fully accepted if that communal memory has itself a firmer grounding in something that is outside of history: something that is integral, in other words, with

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1 E&I, p. 79.

the very basis of the universe. In one of his earliest definitions of symbolism Yeats quotes Blake to the effect that symbol is 'a representation of what actually exists really and unchangeably'.[1] The symbol pushes further, therefore, than being merely the expression of the passions which are common to all men everywhere; it is connected with the true reality of the universe, what actually exists as opposed to the illusions within which we pass our mundane existences. The symbol, however, can only manifest itself through the communal memory and so the loss of communal memory means a de facto loss of contact with what actually and really exists. There is no logical connection between social and ontological symbol, but for Yeats there is an experiential connection.

Several passages from Yeats's journal make the various connections and developments of this pattern of thought more clear. In March 1909 Yeats writes of the development of his own work:

> When I was twenty-five or twenty-six I dreamed of writing a sort of Légende des Siècles of Ireland, setting out with my Wanderings of Oisin and having something of every age. Johnson's work and, later Lady Gregory's work carried on the dream in a different form; and it was only when Synge began to write that I saw that our movement would have to give up the deliberate creation of a kind of Holy City of the imagination, a Holy Sepulchre, as it were, or Holy Grail for the Irish mind, and saw that we must be content to express the individual.[2]

Thus the possibility of creating a symbol - an intellectual symbol - of the Irish mind is lost because of the condition of Irish society. The turning away, as the repeated attempts at definition reveal, is not only a turning away from a symbol of the Irish mind, but from a religious revelation. The Irish situation is not one that can be made a part of that which 'exists really and unchangeably'. Yeats's insistence on a poetry of

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1 'William Blake and his Illustrations to the Divine Comedy', E&I, p. 116.

2 Memoirs, p. 184.

experience during this period was to add markedly to the nature of his work, but it grew out of a desperate loss of confidence in what had been his closest beliefs. In August 1910 he writes:

> Oh masters of life, give me confidence in something, even if it be but in my own reason. I can never believe in anything else now, for I have accused the impulses of too many sins.[1]

This loss of any basis for his beliefs is taken up three years later when he had begun again to attend seances and to interest himself actively in psychic phenomena. He describes an experiment in psychic transference and follows it with this query:

> If symbolic vision is then but thought completing itself, and if, as we must now think, its seat is but the physical nature, and if thought has indeed been photographed, is symbolic thought, as all thought, a reality going its appointed course when impulses are given in heaven or earth, moving when we do not see it as when we do, a mid-world between the two realities, a region of correspondences, the activities of the daimons?[2]

The incantatory development of this sentence suggests the high rhetorical phrasing of many of Yeats's most powerful poems, and like them the sentence seems determined to suggest something that it wishes not to commit itself to. It does point, however, towards the rediscovery of the ontological status of the symbol and symbolic thought. Yeats may be unsure which way the evidence is tending, whether the photographing of thought proves it to be a physical and therefore insubstantial or whether - as he later claimed to Sturge Moore - that it proved science was false in regarding the world as material, but he is re-opening the possibilities of an ontologically based existence for symbolic thought.

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1 Ibid., p. 254.

2 Ibid., p. 268.

Such an ontological basis allows him to escape from the historical situation which has proved so uncongenial to his art: if what exists permanently has the structure of the associationist psychology there is no need for the present to fulfil the aesthetic preconditions of that psychology. The preconditions are fulfilled forever in the parallel world of the spirits. The importance of Yeats's psychic investigations in the period between 1912 and the end of the war has not been fully appreciated because it is seen too often in the retrospect of A Vision. Yeats's system is of course of crucial importance to his poetry, but A Vision is only made possible by the justification of psychical contact outlined hesitantly in 'Swedenborg, Mediums and the Desolate Places' and more confidently in 'Per Amica Silentia Lunae'. A Vision builds history into the transcendent, but can do so only because of the achievements of the previous works and meditations: 'The unknown writer took his theme at first from my just published Per Amica Silentia Lunae'.[1] 'Per Amica Silentia Lunae' is not, I think, merely a prelude to the later and (unjustifiably) more famous work: it is the very basis of that work, uncovering the psychological and psychic structure from which the other will be created. That structure is the creation of an associationist perspective in the spiritual existence of the other world, one that matches and connects with the associational patterns and experiences of our own psychology.

In 'Swedenborg, Mediums and the Desolate Places' Yeats balances constantly his 'investigations' against his belief - 'Not but that I doubt at times'[2] - and yet one feels all the time the undercurrent of

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1 A Vision, p. 8.

2 Ex, p. 31.

excitement that an author whom he had once known and forgotten should be so consistent to his own experience: 'Then one day I opened the Spiritual Diary of Swedenborg which I had not taken down for twenty years, and found all there, even certain thoughts I had not set on paper because they had seemed fantastic from lack of some traditional foundation.'[1] That excitement suggests much more credence in Yeats than he was willing to make public, but it is the excitement of rediscovery not only of Swedenborg, whom he had forgotten, but of traditional memory itself justified in the great Memory. Swedenborg at once explains and is explained by his own theories; he is himself one of the images whose action he describes, returning upon the world as a guiding force. It is a symmetry Yeats could not have resisted, but the symmetry which it allows to be established between aesthetic and ontological demands led to such a sudden upsurge in Yeats's creative endeavour that he must have felt its proximity as the undercurrent of his excitement over psychic discoveries. He notes at the end of section VIII that,

> Swedenborg has written that we are each in the midst of a group of associated spirits who sleep when we sleep and become the dramatis personae of our dreams, and are always the other will that wrestles with our thought, shaping it to our desire.[2]

The word 'associated' is not an accidental usage, our associated spirits are there because of a process of psychological association:

> Communication with Anima Mundi is through the association of thoughts or images or objects; the famous dead and those of whom but a faint memory lingers, can still - and it is for no other end, that all unknowing, we value posthumous fame - tread the corridor and take the empty chair.[3]

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1 Ex, p. 32.

2 Ex, p. 56.

3 Yeats, Essays, p. 527.

Our associated spirits are a function of psychological association, or, equally, our psychological association is our associated spirits.

Yeats provides us with pseudo-scientific justification for these apparitions as being an exhalation of our animal spirits which are essential to the ghost as to the living man. It is the shared substance between the two worlds and, once separated from an individual, it can be shaped by his own or by others' minds as they will. Yeats cautions us about this phenomena in relation to séances:

> Yet we never long escape the phantasmagoria nor can long forget that we are among the shape-changers. Sometimes our own minds shape that mysterious substance, which may be life itself, according to desire or constrained by memory, and the dead no longer remembering their own names become the characters in a drama we have invented.[1]

It is this active process, however, that is very difficult for Yeats to account for: where does activity stem from? When we communicate with the Anima Mundi is it our own associations or the spirits' associations that we experience? The problem is a parallel problem to the problem of the artist: is he the victim of his own associative processes, or does he have some creative control over them? Yeats invokes the parallel in an attempt to answer the problem in 'Per Amica Silentia Lunae':

> The vehicle once separate from the living man or woman may be moulded by the souls of others as readily as by its own soul, and even it seems by the souls of the living. It becomes a part for a while of that stream of images which I have compared to reflections upon water.[2]

The spiritual substance thus becomes an external image to other souls instead of the informing shape of our own bodies: the corollary, of

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1 Ex, p. 55.

2 Yeats, Essays, p. 515.

course, is that our own body is a projected image, the habitual image, of our souls offered to others. Freed from that habitual form, however, they are open to our own creation,

> But how does it follow that souls who have never handled the modelling tool or the brush, make perfect images? Those materialisations who imprint their powerful faces upon paraffin wax, leave there sculpture that would have taken a good artist, making and imagining, many hours. How did it follow that an ignorant woman could, as Henry More believed, project her vehicle in so good a likeness of a hare, that horse and hound and huntsman followed with the bugle blowing? Is not the problem the same as of those finely articulated scenes and patterns that come out of the dark, seemingly completed in the winking of an eye, as we are lying half asleep, and of all those elaborate images that drift in moments of inspiration or evocation before the mind's eye? Our animal spirits or vehicles are but as it were a condensation of the vehicle of Anima Mundi, and give substance to its images in the faint materialisation of our common thought.[1]

The creation, in other words, is not our own, but the sudden filling of a space we have made or a projection of our 'vehicle' by something already complete in Anima Mundi. Compare Yeats's description of the working of poetry in 'The Symbolism of Poetry' in 1900:

> The purpose of rhythm, it has always seemed to me, is to prolong the moment when we are both asleep and awake, which is the one moment of creation, by hushing us with an alluring monotony, while it holds us waking by variety, to keep us in that state of perhaps real trance, in which the mind liberated from the pressure of the will is unfolded in symbols.[2]

Rhythm creates exactly the kind of space into which an image from Anima Mundi can descend so that the mind can 'unfold' the patterns of association that hold symbols together. Such unfolding is not based in the accidents of personal memory, but in the contours of the great Memory to which,

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1 Yeats, Essays, pp. 515-516.

2 'The Symbolism of Poetry', E&I, p. 159.

for a moment, we have access and which operates by its own associative processes:

> I am persuaded that a logical process, or a series of related images, has body and period, and I think of Anima Mundi as a great pool or garden where it moves through its allotted growth like a great water plant or fragrantly branches in the air. Indeed as Spenser's Garden of Adonis:
>
> There is the first seminary
> Of all things that are born to live and die
> According to their kynds.
>
> The soul by changes of 'vital congruity', More says, draws to it a certain thought, and this thought draws by its association the sequence of many thoughts, endowing them with a life in the vehicle meted out according to the intensity of the first perceptiom. A seed is set growing, and this growth may go on apart from the power, apart even from the knowledge of the soul.[1]

This is a description both of the process of a poem, which records the associative connection discovered by the poet, or the discovery of such an image dramatised by him, and it also describes the response of the reader to the poem. The poem is a growth of 'logical process' or 'a series of related images' drawn by its association with many thoughts into its particular shape; that shape, however, sets off a similar process in the reader's mind, tracking through a 'sequence of many thoughts' which operates 'apart even from any knowledge of the soul'. The condition of the poem and of the mind that experiences it is identical with the condition that Yeats describes of himself in relation to his most intense images:

> I am in the place where the daemon is, but I do not think he is with me until I begin to make a new personality, selecting among those images, seeking always to satisfy a hunger grown out of conceit with daily diet; and yet as I write the words 'I select' I am full of uncertainty not knowing when I am the finger, when the clay.[2]

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1 Yeats, Essays, p. 519.

2 Yeats, Essays, p. 534.

The poet who writes his poem discovers himself, makes himself again but in a process which he does not control, since he cannot know where his images come from, what their dynamic is that they should choose him as a vehicle. When he 'selects' among the images what guides his choice? Is it he who is selected by it?

> When a man writes a work of genius, or invents some creative action, is it not because some knowledge or power has come into his mind from beyond his mind? It is called up by an image, as I think; all my birds' adventures started when I hung a little saucer at one side of the cage, and at the other a bundle of hair and grass; but our images must be given to us, we cannot choose them deliberately.[1]

This is equally true of the reader who experiences many poems and cannot choose the images which will become the guiding forces of his existence. The poem,and its associations,chooses him and his associations: outer and inner are thus set in a dialectical relationship which cannot be resolved into any kind of priority. What we have are two chains of associative processes, one in the individual mind and one in the Anima Mundi and the directions which each will take are a function of their moments of interaction. The passionate moments in our life will become the memories we relive in after life and become thereby images in Anima Mundi; the images we experience in trance or reverie or at the instigation of art are images out of the Anima Mundi released into our consciousness to aid our actions:

> The toil of the living is to free themselves from an endless sequence of objects, and that of the dead to free themselves from an endless sequence of thoughts. One sequence begets another ...[2]

We are neither active nor passive, but rather participate in a flow of images moving by processes of association which will suddenly be changed

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1 Autobiographies, p. 272.

2 Yeats, Essays, p. 520.

by conflicting with a process of association going on in another dimension. The two realms are like the two parts of a metaphor whose meaning is generated by the interraction of their associative potentialities, potentialities which can never be resolved into harmony. The dialectic between the stasis of poetic form and the flux of associative reaction to it is repeated in the very ontological division of the world. The image from one realm, when perceived in the other, seems like something static, fixed, formed, but sets off trains of consequential images in the realm it has invaded: the image of the hare sets huntsmen and hounds upon a chase. Action in this world is itself only a process of association set going by the effects in it of images from Anima Mundi:

> Shelley was of opinion that the 'thoughts which are called real or external objects' differed but in regularity of occurrence from 'hallucinations, dreams and ideas of madmen', and noticed that he had dreamed, therefore lessening the difference, 'three several times between intervals of two or more years the same precise dream'. If all our mental images no less than apparitions (and I see no reason to distinguish) are forms existing in the general vehicle of Anima Mundi, and mirrored in our particular vehicle, many crooked things are made straight.[1]

The great danger of such a world, however, as Shelley had conceived, is that we are deprived of all action and exertion by a sense of a world flowing on independently of us. Those critics who insist on the development in Yeats of a sense of the 'whole man' - 'we should ascend out of common interests, the thoughts of the newspapers, of the market-place, of men of science, but only so far as we can carry the normal, passionate, reasoning self, the personality as a whole'[2] - must bear in mind that Yeats's development was far from unilinear. The confrontation with the ordinary world and with the place in it of action, a confrontation

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1 Yeats, Essays, p. 518.

2 'Discoveries', E&I, p. 272.

based primarily in his experience of the theatre, both as writer and manager, did not reduce to any marked extent his sense of its 'unreality' in our ordinary sense. Like Berkeley he justified its existence by an indirect route, by its existence in perception, but he was always aware of its dream-like quality. The reality of images we perceive as part of the ordinary world, if they have any substance at all, is very different from that which we would normally ascribe to them:

> Though images appear to flow and drift, it may be that we but change in our relation to them, now losing, now finding with the shifting of our minds. Henry More speaks by the book, in claiming that those images may be hard to the right touch as 'pillars of crystal' and as solidly coloured as our own to the right eyes.[1]

The increasing 'realism' of Yeats's verse does not imply any change in his attitude to the reality of the external world.

This is important to the discussion of Yeats's theory of the Mask, for that theory is often presented as being Yeats's mode of integrating poetry with action in the world. The Mask is what a man constructs as the opposite of himself in order to remake himself in the world. The activity, however, should not be taken to imply that the world is not as Shelley described it: the world for Yeats is always a place of images, though those images may be images of actions, passing through the contemplative soul. Actions, like everything else, exist only in the perceptions of souls, which are the only reality.

The theory of the Mask is, in fact, integral with the associative pattern of Yeats's thought. The Mask is an image introduced into our world from the other world as a guider of the images we experience, it

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1 Yeats, Essays, p. 517.

is an impulse which, like a poem, sets off a chain of associations which we are compelled, if we want knowledge, to follow. As always Yeats presents this dialectically, working from two different perspectives. From the perspective of our ordinary world the process is one of gradually breaking down the apparent reality of our own selves until we become illusions, until we become images passing before our own eyes:

> They have but one purpose, to bring their chosen man to the greatest obstacle he can confront without despair. They contrived Dante's banishment, and snatched away his Beatrice, and thrust Villon into the arms of Harlots, and sent him to gather cronies at the foot of the gallows, that Dante and Villon might ... turn all to Mask and Image, and so be phantoms in their own eyes.[1]

In other words, we construct a self which is a pattern of art, a pattern of perfection unrelated to the imposed accretions of casual life. The creation of such a pattern, however, is achieved under the influence of guidance from the other world. The "They" of the above quotation are 'personifying spirits' and they bring the great artist to the point where he can see his own life in the process of reverie: it is Dante and Villon

> and their sort alone who earn contemplation, for it is only when the intellect has wrought the whole life to drama, to crisis, that we may live for contemplation, and yet keep our intensity.[2]

The artistic basis of Yeats's description would lead me to assert that this is related to the associative process, but I need no such inference. The guiding spirits of this transformation are the dead, gradually winnowing their own memory through constant reliving until its pattern is pure. They cannot begin to recreate themselves into a new form, however, without the aid of the life of a living man, with all its accidental shape:

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1 Autobiographies, pp. 272-3.

2 Autobiographies, pp. 273-4.

> The dead, as the passionate necessity wears out, come into a measure of freedom and may turn the impulse of events, started while living, in some new direction, but they cannot originate except through the living. Then gradually they perceive, although they are still but living in their memories, harmonies, symbols, and patterns, as though all were being refashioned by an artist ...[1]

It is in the interaction of these two memories, the memory of the living man and the living memory of the dead, that each discovers a pattern which will escape the accidents of ordinary memory. It is, of course, images in terms of art, and is a description of the form of Yeats's own art: the memory and associations of the poet through the shape and rhythm of his artifice discovers a new pattern, a new existence from the mind of the reader, who constructs for himself a new existence out of the images of the poem. Two patterns of association merge and transcend themselves in the space provided by the poem, but having merged the transcendence slowly declines towards its original set of associations, now different only by having one more memory, just as the dead having purified themselves in contact with our life, prepare themselves to return to live: 'We perceive in the pulsation of an artery, and after slowly decline.'[2] Time has been transcended by wrapping together in a single instant, a moment of apprehension, the winnowed experience not only of two lives, but of many lives and many buried selves.

The Mask appears as something external to us, but its reality is internal because what it makes possible is the discovery of the self that is buried under the experience, the habitual associations, of our ordinary life. The theoretical statement is given in 'Per Amica Silentia Lunae':

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1 Yeats, Essays, pp. 522-523.

2 Yeats, Essays, p. 529.

> The dead living in their memories, are, I am persuaded, the source of all that we call instinct, and it is their love and their desire, all unknowing, that make us drive beyond our reason, or in defiance of our interest it may be; and it is the dream martens that, all unknowing, are master-martens to the living martens building about church windows their elaborate nests ...[1]

and its relevance to the artistic life is given in Autobiographies:

> I know now that revelation is from the self, but from that age-long memoried self, that shapes the elaborate shell of the mollusc and the child in the womb, that teaches the birds to make their nest; and that genius is a crisis that joins that buried self for certain moments to our trivial daily mind.[2]

Ontology thus dissolves back into psychology: the spirits who surround us are in fact within us, buried in our memory. 'The way up is the way down'. Outer and inner have been put in a mirroring relation which justifies both the psychology by which poetry operates and the ontological validity of what it thereby reveals. These theories made it possible for Yeats to recreate an associationist art because the ends of art were achievable only through the interaction of different levels of association existing either separately in spirits or integrally in the depths of the mind. What started as a psychological explanation of how art might operate has had to be justified, and thereby to justify art, by becoming the very structure of the universe in which we live.

The question, of course, with which we are constantly confronted in Yeats scholarship is the relevance of all this. The man has created an absurd myth about the nature of the world in order to explain his own poetry; since much of the poetry is devoted to a subject matter drawn

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1 Yeats, Essays, p. 526.

2 Autobiographies, p. 272.

from that myth how seriously can we take it. Isn't it a self-defeating situation? I want to answer that in two different ways, one that corresponds to the ontological/epistemological aspect of Yeats's thought, and one that corresponds to its specifically aesthetic character.

The situation of modern literature has been described as one of permanent 'crisis' by Frank Kermode; an apocalyptic sense of impending disaster. Kermode suggests that this apocalyptic sense is not new, but that we have an innate tendency to see history as reaching a climax in our own times and to see the arbitrary beginnings and endings of our historical datings as humanly significant:

> ...the whole concurrence of fin-de-siècle phenomena amply illustrates Focillon's thesis, that we project our existential anxieties on to history; there is a real correlation between the ends of centuries and the peculiarity of our imagination that chooses always to be at the end of an era.[1]

However, the very invention of the 'fin-de-siècle' postulates a new kind of awareness, a qualitative change in the kind of apocalyptic expectation in question. This difference in kind is, I think, reflected in the awareness - which begins in the 1890s - of the totally changed situation not only of the arts but of all human knowledge in its relation to the universe. Leonard Conversi outlines the crisis in the following terms:

> Modern literature is the first literature that has had to pretend it did not know itself. All its self-conscious limitation of consciousness via the manipulation of symbol, point of view, irony or soi-distant nihilism represents an effort to keep at arm's length the knowledge held out to it by the exact and less exact sciences, which are seen as competitors of art at best and, at worst, the obviation of it.[2]

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1 Frank Kermode, 'The New Apocalyptists', Partisan Review, XXXIII, 1966, p. 431.

2 Leonard Conversi, 'Mann, Yeats and the Truth of Art', Yale Review, LVI, 1967, p. 506.

Such a view perpetuates the belief of a division between science and art which, pace Lord Snow, ceased to be relevant in terms of the real nature of each in exactly the period that Conversi is describing. The modern condition does not allow literature to come to terms with the totality of human knowledge, but in this respect it is no different from the individual parts of 'the exact and less exact sciences': the elliptical nature of modern literature is not an escape from the knowledge held out by science, but is homologous with the condition of science itself. Even to talk of the 'exact' sciences is a falsification of their true nature, and it is the crisis of that nature which is identical with the crisis in literature - the realisation that science only operates within self-imposed limitations of consciousness. Each layer of knowledge dissolves into another, biology into chemistry, chemistry into physics and physics into mathematics: our ultimate knowledge is no more than an imaginative construction with symbolisms which are purely human inventions. Atoms dissolve into particles of energy and there are as many particles as there are interpretations of a poem:

> Our theories, beginning with primitive myths and evolving into the theories of science, are indeed man-made, as Kant said. We do try to impose them on the world, and we can always stick to them dogmatically if we wish, even if they are false (as are not only most religious myths, it seems, but also Newton's theory, which is the one Kant had in mind). But although we at first have to stick to our theories - without our theories we cannot even begin, for we have nothing else to go by - we can, in the course of time, adopt a more critical attitude towards them. We can try to replace them by something better if we have learned, with their help, where they let us down. Thus there may arise a scientific or critical phase of thinking, which is necessarily preceded by an uncritical phase.
>
> Kant, I felt, had been right when he said that it was impossible that knowledge was, as it were, a copy or impression of reality. He was right to believe that knowledge was genetically or psychologically a priori, but quite wrong to suppose that any knowledge could be a priori valid. Our

> theories are our inventions; but they may be merely ill-reasoned guesses, bold conjectures, hypotheses. Out of these we create a world: not the real world, but our nets in which we try to catch the real world.[1]

The crisis of realising that science was in fact an interpretive procedure and not a discovery of exact truth was further intensified by the less exact sciences, which offered to reveal the reasons for the scientists' discovery of particular theories at particular times. The essential basis of the old positivistic science, the neutrality of the observing mind, was shown to be hollow, and the more so if the psychologists were right and the search for knowledge might itself be a neurotic symptom, a Faustian desire to push God the Father from his control over life, an Oedipal annexing of the world by removing its previous controller.

At every turn we are thrust back into subjectivity: a subjectivity which can perhaps find the world, but only where that world corresponds to the shape of subjectivity. Conversi sees Yeats as one of the main violators of the real demand made on the artist by the modern condition because, 'of the willfulness with which he tried to impose a personal vision on material that had acquired too many rights of its own'.[2] But what Yeats does is to present us with a structure of thought and of art which allows him exactly to present the nature of our subjective relationship with an alien world. The details of Yeats's wilful use of others'

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1 Karl Popper, Unended Quest: An Intellectual Autobiography (Glasgow: Fontana/Collins, 1976), pp.59-60. The concept of the two cultures would, one would hope, reveal its essential sterility - even as a demand that we should know something of both - from realisations like the following: '..."unambiguous" concepts, or concepts with "sharp boundary lines", do not exist. Thus we need not be surprised at a remark like that by Clifford A. Truesdell about the laws of thermodynamics: "Every physicist knows exactly what the first and the second law mean, but ... no two physicists agree about them".' (p.29).

2 Leonard Conversi, 'Yeats, Mann and the Truth of Art', Yale Review, LVI, p. 510.

material is irrelevant, since he is not interested in the material for its own sake, but as it reveals the underlying structure of our relationship with the universe. As I have already said, Yeats knew more about the real nature of science than most of those who have criticised his 'magical' interests. Yeats's concern with occult subjects in fact allowed him to see deeper into the modern condition than most. His world reveals to us, as I hope my analysis of his aesthetic has shown, a dramatic presentation of the relationship between subjectivity and objectivity in an 'other-world' which is identical with the structure of our own and fulfils its deepest wishes. Yeats's poetry and his aesthetic theory enact for us the human situation of a world in which we find ourselves everywhere, even in that which is most alien:

> And what rough beast, its hour come round at last,
> Slouches towards Bethlehem to be born?

The 'vast image out of Spiritus Mundi' is a human creation, humanising the fearful alienness of the world even as it tries to apprehend its otherness. Of course, we have to accept the consequences of our hypotheses once they are set to work in the world; Einstein has to face the hydrogen bomb, Yeats died too soon to face the real consequences of fascism. It is of no use, however, to treat such thinking as something properly to be divorced from action; as Yeats recognised we must act upon the illusion of our mask, the shape we give to ourselves in the world. We cannot retreat into an academic scepticism such as Kermode offers us: 'Fictions, notably the fiction of apocalypse, turn easily into myths; people will live by that which was designed only to know by.'[1] The consequences of the myth cannot be made into a mistake about the logical status of its place within art.

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1 Kermode, 'The New Apocalyptists', Partisan Review, XXXIII, p. 353.

Fictions as well as myths are there to be lived by, since what they offer us is knowledge of our situation, the situation in which we have to live. At its best, Yeats's art acknowledges the limits of subjectivity to the final limits of being an exploration of the subjectivity of the reader rather than a message for him, but the views and myths which Yeats used to fill out that subjectivity are not separate from it: they are demanded by it as an escape into action since only in action can the knowledge we have become ours. If all knowledge is indeed a subjective imposition on the world, then the world is at once entirely alien and, at the same time, there to be made into the image of our humanity. Or rather, into the image of our inhumanity since we cannot even know ourselves as separate from the forces that drive that alien world. We who have not stepped near the abyss have, perhaps, no right to criticise those who have stood on the edge: we stand ourselves within a fiction whose humanity may be precisely its lack of temptation. Only if we are prepared not only to take on the burden of the knowledge that Yeats and the other moderns who have suffered a similar temptation have sometimes submitted to, but to take on the consequence of acting upon such knowledge, have we the right to condemn. Because if all our knowledge is a fiction what do we act upon? - and if we cease to act, we leave the world to those who are able to believe in what they know is a fiction.[1] Through the esoteric chambers

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1 The dilemma is one faced - or rather, avoided - by the narrator of Mann's Doctor Faustus, who admires the art of his friend Leverkhun but, having no active values of his own, cannot oppose its consequential political values. Liberalism of that kind has no power against the forces of evil which art, by being closer to the abyss, understands and, worse, is related to in its very nature. The following passage reveals the essence of the attitude: 'Much better was it for me to chime in with the others; to look at the new, to explore it, and instead of offering it futile and certainly boring opposition, to adapt my conceptions to the course of the discussion ...' (Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1967, p. 354). Compare this view with my discussion of Pater and innovative criticism below.

of his thought Yeats came to the core of our modern condition, a core which, in his case, was structured on the assumptions of the dilemma of passivity and activity in the associationist aesthetic and its attendent theory of symbols.

On the more limited but more basically literary level of aesthetic considerations I must also insist on structural importance of the associationist principle. I am not maintaining that this is, in fact, how we do actually experience works of art, but that Yeats's awareness of the associationist model allowed him to achieve an art which is peculiarly modern, not only in the sense outlined above, but because of its insistence on the subjectivity of meaning and of response. Edward Engelberg suggests of Yeats's mature concept of the symbol that in order to

> avoid the frigidity of form without substance as well as the quicksand of substance without form, the artist must insist on maintaining the transitional relationships that keep him close to his work. Like a puppeteer he holds all the strings, no matter how multitudinous they become; and like Fielding in the middle of Tom Jones he delights in that power. All contemplation must be directed towards the object, not away from it.[1]

As will have been evident from the above discussion I think nothing could be further from the truth than the comparison with Fielding; Yeats's symbol is one which is constantly escaping from the artist's control because it generates multitudinous associations which he cannot predict. All contemplation is as a result of the symbol, but by its very nature it demands that the mind moves constantly away from the given. Of course, this is destructive to the very nature of poetry unless it can be controlled and Yeats's attempts to find a technique of controlling it form one of the dynamic aspects of his art. The most successful one was to make the

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1 Engelberg, The Vast Design, pp. 124-125.

the poem climactic, building from an ordinary speech towards an overwhelming revelation of image or symbol which would release, beyond the confines of the poem itself, a stream of associations in the reader's mind. The associative process is thus thrown beyond the poem, though an essential part of the experience of it.

The development of Yeats's art of the symbol is towards ever more concrete realisation of the symbolic object not in order to avoid suggestive vagueness but in order to intensify the specific qualities of the associations: instead of associations which are generated on a single level of apprehension, such as those produced by the rose, which are all 'intellectual' in Yeats's sense, we are given symbols which create associations on various different levels: the Tower is biographical, historical, has certain definite physical characteristics all of which can be employed in any poem without losing our awareness of the general quality of 'towerness'. Because the image contains this multitude of levels its associative power increases: in its own structure it contains the conflicting elements which make the discordant metaphor or simile so powerfully associative exactly because they cannot be harmonised into any unity. Again I think Engelberg has misunderstood Yeats's thought by not being aware of the nature of associationist principles in art when he writes:

> It cannot be too much stressed that by 'emotion of multitude' Yeats never meant a multitude of emotions. Multitude was no mere summary of diversified emotions or events, no quantitative measure at all. Through the choice of proper symbols, art attained a qualitative richness which, on the stage for instance, would be more successful proportionate to the economy of physical props.[1]

Engelberg's description of Yeats's dramatic practice is, of course, accurate,

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1 Engelberg, The Vast Design, p. 122.

but the purpose of the reduced staging was to increase the associative potentiality of the piece: a sparsely decorated stage, but one where every object was symbolic, induced the flow of associations which constituted the central reality of art. A realistic stage could only inhibit that inner movement. Also, however, it reduced the possibility of creating conflicting associations from the irrelevances of stage presentation: the emotional tenor of the play has to be single in order to unify the quantitative multitude of associated images which the play will inspire in its audience. The bareness of the stage is there to be filled out with all that the mind brings to its characters from their past, from its past, from history and myth and the unconscious. The more of these levels that the image on stage or in a poem can invoke the more effective will it be, both psychologically and aesthetically.

Such a view of the poem or play makes the work of the critic extremely difficult: it justifies, in fact, the kind of recreation into the response of another work that we can see in critics like Pater - something which is, of course, hardly surprising given the importance that Yeats accorded to Pater as an artist. It offers no consolation to all our exegetical efforts, but then poets do not write to justify the existence of critics. The poems may not in fact operate in the way that Yeats thought they should do, which at a stroke allows us to return to the fray, but the method of approach we adopt must not violate the very nature of the art we are examining. The most recent and extended attempt to analyse the nature of Yeats's - and indeed of all - symbolism is Robert Snukal's.[1] Snukal argues that all literary productions are 'icons', or work by means of

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1 Robert Snukal, High Talk: The Philosophical Poetry of W.B. Yeats (Cambridge: University Press, 1973).

'iconic signification', a term he draws from C.S. Pierce via Wimsatt and Beardsley's The Verbal Icon. He sums up his argument by insisting that

> literary symbols are not words, but what I have called icons, and to ask what a symbol means is not to ask, for example, what 'moon' means, as if the dictionary was somehow overthrown, irrelevant, to how words are used in poems - but to ask what is the import of this imaginary object, the moon, described in this way and in relationship to these other objects.[1]

The problem with this view lies not only in the rather elliptical sense in which the moon is an imaginery object, but in what sense the moon as symbol corresponds to Snukal's actual definition of 'icon':

> Pierce's third sort of sign was called an icon, and following Pierce, some philosophers have talked of 'iconic signification'. A sign is an icon if it signifies by virtue of a real quality of its own. A good example of a non-linguistic icon is a map. Although some elements in a map, for example, the names printed on them, or the dots used to represent cities, are conventional, for the most part, a map signifies the geography mapped by virtue of its (that is, the map's) proportions. The map and the area mapped are isomorphic, and by virtue of the map's proportions we are able to read off the proportions of the geographical area. In order for one thing to serve as an icon for another, someone must take them to have at least one property in common.[2]

In what sense, one must ask, is the moon as an imaginary object like a map? By what resemblance do we tell that the moon as imaginary object is to be read off as some other thing? What is it that the moon is isomorphic with? A map is verifiable: we can go to wherever it is that the map outlines and if we fail to find our way around despite our knowledge of maps we can ascertain that the map is wrong. Where do we go to ascertain the validity of the icon; what is it we compare it with to see if it is accurate? The result of the assumption that there is something which

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1 Snukal, High Talk, p. 58.

2 Ibid., p. 60.

the 'icon' resembles by means of isomorphism is that Snukal makes an elementary mistake of the kind that he castigates other critics for making. Despite the fact that an icon is imaginary in the case of literary works the nature of iconic signification demands the substitution for a set of meanings a set of - albeit imaginary - objects:

> Since the language of literature is referentially truncated, that is, since we are dealing with an imaginary object, event or process, we have only as much event, object or process as the poet gives us. There are no 'facts' about the icon that can be discovered in the world.[1] It is for this reason that the rejoinder 'But it's not in the poem' or 'There's no evidence for that interpretation in the poem' seem to be the most powerful sort of rejoinder to interpretations we think wrong. We don't care what sort of thing someone does before they interpret the poem - an ouija board is fine, if it helps - but the interpretation, however discovered, is good only in so far as it is an interpretation of the 'icon', of this set of imaginary events. There are always at least two jobs that a critic or reader must do. We must first get clear what the icon is (what happens in Hamlet?) and only then is it possible to discover what the import of the icon is.[2]

The assumption that these last two questions are different is a result of assuming there is something the poem or play resembles, a set of imaginary events, which we can establish as we can establish what is really in the landscape depicted by a map. But what happens in Hamlet is something we can only know by an act of interpretation: the imaginary object is constructed by our interpretation, not for our interpreting. To us the term 'imaginary object' suggests that there is an imaginary object in the same sense that there is a landscape which we can establish as the referent

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1 This is patently untrue: there are plenty of facts about the moon which we discover in the world and which we use to understand Yeats's use of the moon, even though he does not describe those facts which define its symbolic correspondence with some psychological process.

2 Snukal, High Talk, p. 59.

of the icon, but there is no imaginary object, there is only the process of imagining an object and our imagining of the object not only gives us nothing to which an iconic resemblance can be attached but is dependent on the interpretative schema by which the object takes shape in our imagining.

Snukal introduces further confusion by using the term 'icon' both for the individual symbols in a poem and for the poem as a whole. In the latter context the following statement makes sense, but in the context in which it is placed it makes none at all:

> The 'icons' in poems are, it is my contention, icons in Pierce's sense of iconic. That is, they are imaginary events, objects or processes which are significant by virtue of a property or properties of their own, which property or properties they share with other elements of ordinary experience.[1]

Now it might possibly be true that poems share some of their properties with other elements of ordinary experience - the emotions we experience from poems are similar to emotions we experience in real life - but they share those properties because we give them simulacra of our own emotions: the poet's emotions, and even more so the poet's imaginary emotions, are not there for us to compare to see if they share any of the properties of our ordinary experience. Snukal believes that too often in discussing symbolism we forget that we are not dealing with words but with objects; but to think that because we have a common language means we know what the object is that is described by that language is just as fallacious. There are perhaps, as Wittgenstein argued, no private languages, but there are private experiences of the images produced by elements in a

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1 Snukal, High Talk, p. 61.

language.[1]

'Iconic signification' is another version of the language of symbolism which I discussed earlier in this chapter: it is an attempt to make specific what is by its very nature a denial of specificity. Snukal attacks Unterecker for suggesting that 'no symbol has a meaning', that any meaning we give it is 'either a part of its meaning or one of its possible meanings',[2] and asserts that 'this is the abdication of criticism in a subjective riot of possible, always correct, interpretations and evaluations'.[3] The first fallacy of Snukal's comment, the role of interpretation, has already been dealt with. The fact that such interpretations should always be correct follows from a proper understanding of his own iconic theory: if the poem's purpose is to construct an imaginery experience in its reader that experience is neither true nor false, it exists, it is 'part of our being, not our knowledge'. The purpose of the symbolic poem is not the communication of meaning, but, as Yeats insists, a revelation and that revelation of our 'buried self' is what is achieved by the subjective riot of images which the poem produces. 'Riot' of course is emotively intended to affright our sense of order, but the subjective flow of associations exists precisely to reveal order, to

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1 See below, 'The Loss and Recovery of Memory', for a discussion of Snukal's analysis of 'The Cold Heaven' and an application of these disagreements. Instead of isomorphism of the map kind Snukal refers us to the poet's substitution of an individual member of a class for the whole class; as an instance he offers us the use of 'Adam' as a symbol of mankind, 'by virtue of being an (imaginary) man' (P.61). The absurdity of this needs little demonstration: John Macgillivary is not a symbol of mankind though he is an individual of the class. In a story we could read him as standing for all men, but not in the same way that Adam does who (imaginarily) was the source of all men. Snukal makes the particular experience of 'The Cold Heaven' stand for all cases of human fear at the forces of humanity's own idealism.

2 Unterecker, Reader's Guide, p. 34.

3 Snukal, High Talk, p. 45.

allow us to discover the hidden pattern, the pure relations that underly the accretions of our own memory. There is no way we can get to these except by experiencing them as fully as possible and, through that experience, by sifting the essential from the accidental. It is this that the poem allows us to do according to Yeats. Yeats may have been wrong, but on the other hand it is likely that at least some of his symbols will have been constructed on the basis of this premise and so, by their very nature, allow of no resolution into objectivity, into the single unified reading that Snukal demands. In fact, Yeats himself was often tempted by exactly such a resolution as Snukal and Frye would demand as he wrote the notes and systems that were to explain the symbols of his poetry. The poetry hesitates between these two modes: it can generate multiple associations, or it can confine the significance of its associations to a single, one to one correspondence. The whole structure of Yeats's theoretical thinking demands, I have argued, that we consider the poems to operate on the former principle, without losing our awareness that Yeats himself was tempted to treat them otherwise. This not only corresponds with Yeats's own theoretical writings, I think it corresponds with most people's experience of the poems themselves. The number of elucidatory works for the general reader - if one can imagine that fiction to have any place in our society - reveals the extent to which most readers of Yeats experience the poems as, at least in part, structurally obscure.

Such opacity is not, however, a loss of critical standards or a loss of aesthetic value. Yeats was right in the centre of the development of modern art as he wrestled with the problem of making the logical unfolding of the energies of his medium fit the nature of the world he lived in and relate to the people whom he supposed himself to be addressing. The much

discussed 'obscurity' of modern art is a result not of obscure things being said by artists - after all they mostly write pretty clear essays telling us what they think on everything from the existence of God to the value of other artists and our economic systems - but a result of a new kind of art, one in which communication is not the purpose. James L. Kugel[1] has suggested that inherent in the symbolist technique is 'strangeness', the deliberate cultivation of the mysterious by the evasion of one or more of our normal parameters of context for understanding any verbal communication. I would argue, of course, for the centrality of associationist based aesthetic concepts in this development, but the two are not exclusive. Each is an attempt to avoid communication as such: associationism is a purposive avoidance, substituting a different kind of knowledge for that derived from ordinary communication, whereas 'strangeness' for its own sake is the creation of a new criterion of literary interest and aesthetic value. The avoidance of communication is, however, central to the nature of modern art: Yeats's career forms a series of oscillations between the acceptance and the rejection of this fact.

The development of these non-communicative works is not accidentally related, perhaps, to the rise of interpretive criticism. The artist sees his work taken over and given new meaning by subsequent critics not in the casual way in which all works of art undergo some transformation in each individual's experience of them, but in a conscious and deliberate process of recreation, of making contemporary. 'Make it new' is the dictum for the critic as well as the creator. Pater describes the situation explicitly, as we might expect of the critic who most successfully practised that dictum

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1 James L. Kugel, Techniques of Strangeness in Symbolist Poetry (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1971).

in the nineteenth century, in the conclusion to The Renaissance:

> With this sense of the splendour of our experience and of its awful brevity, gathering all we are into one desperate effort to see and touch, we shall hardly have time to make theories about the things we see and touch. What we have to do is to be forever curiously testing new opinions and courting new impressions.[1]

The courting of new impressions is, to a large extent, one of the central functions of modern art and its whole experimental basis, as Frederic Jameson has noted in his discussion of Theodor Adorno:

> ... the increasing tempo of artistic change since Romanticism and the conquest of power by the middle classes involves a modification of the functional value of the new within the artistic process. Novelty is now felt to be not a relatively secondary and natural by-product, but rather an end in itself. No knowledge of the innovations of the past furnishes a new kind of stimulus for the construction of the individual works themselves, so that tehcnical revolutions such as that of Schoenberg must henceforth be read on two levels: not only as one more moment in the gradual and autonomous evolution of material which has characterized the whole history of music, but also, and above all, as an object lesson in a peculiarly modern phenomenon: the attempt to think your way, through sheer formal invention, into the very future itself.[2]

The attempt to anticipate the future is the attempt to court new impressions more and more rapidly, defying the slowness with which history has brought them about. This applies equally to the critical endeavour, which attempts to beat the process of history by leap-frogging to the next novelty now, to reach before it actually happens a new perspective for generating interpretations of all the works of the past. In such a context the artist is taken from himself; he cannot predict the effects his work will have, he cannot be certain of the contexts in which he will be read and so creates a work which opens itself permanently to multiple interpretation.

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1 Walter Pater, The Renaissance (London: Fontana, 1961) p. 223.

2 Frederic Jameson, Marxism and Form (Princeton: University Press, 1971), p. 19.

Such 'open' works are characteristic of the modern movement in the arts: the ironic and heroic readings of Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man probably constitute not different interpretive schema but such an open structure. Such structural configurations of the work of art have been analysed by Umberto Eco, from whom I have borrowed the term open, in relation to music, where evidently the openness is undeflected by referential content:

> ... a classical composition ... posited an assemblage of sound units which the composer arranged in a closed well-defined manner before presenting it to the listener. He converted his idea into conventional symbols which more or less obliged the eventual performer to reproduce the format devised by the composer. Whereas the new musical works ... reject the definitive, concluded message and multiply the formal possibilities of the distribution of their elements. They appeal to the initiative of the individual performer, and hence they offer themselves not as finite works which prescribe specific repitition along given structural co-ordinates, but as 'open' works which are brought to their conclusion by the performer at the same time as he experiences them on an aesthetic plane.[1]

Through the associationist theory it is, I believe, towards such an openness of structure that Yeats's work - and, in a different but closely related way, Eliot's - is tending. No literature can completely divorce itself from the referential aspect of language and therefore necessarily specifies in a way that music does not, but by the use of symbols it opens itself not only to multiple interpretation, but to multiple experiences, since each symbol exists to generate an associative train of thought which is the real completion of the work, and which will be different in each reader. The finite work becomes infinite by refusing to limit itself by what Snukal, attempting to retain the old world of univocal meanings, calls 'the normal range of associations that are normally available to [its] audience'.[2]

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1 Umberto Eco, 'The Poetics of the Open Work', 20th Century Studies, 12, 1974, p. 6.

2 Snukal, High Talk, p. 61.

The irony of Yeats's theory of symbolism is that the symbol, which achieved the poetic transcendence of the world of time by wrapping all time into itself, only transcends time by submitting itself to be renewed in each new period of history, in each new reading of the poem. The symbol transcends time by being all things to all men, by changing its 'meanings', its associations in accord with each change of fashion. Luckily for Yeats, perhaps, he never committed himself entirely to the logic of his own associationist principles. His language always held sufficiently to the referential mode to present us with a context, though mostly an insufficient one, for the elucidation of his most important poems, but they did so very often by being <u>about</u> the process of writing an open poetry. Yeats's description of his own reaction to his earlier poetic achievements is also the deep truth about each individual reader's response:

> Those masterful images because complete
> Grew in pure mind, but out of what began?
> A mound of refuse or the sweepings of a street,
> Old kettles, old bottles, and a broken can,
> Old iron, old bones, old rags, that raving slut
> Who keeps the till. Now that my ladder's gone,
> I must lie down where all the ladder's start,
> In the foul rag-and-bone shop of the heart.[1]

We climb to those masterful images only to return to the accidental leftovers of our own experience in our own consciousness - unless there is more there, some universal such as Yeats's ontology offered, than just the accidents that life accords to us. That struggle dominated Yeats intellectual existence, as it dominated Eliot's, who achieved the masterpiece of the open art, which Yeats was always approaching and then swerving away from, in <u>The Waste Land</u>.

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1 'The Circus Animals' Desertion', <u>CP</u>, p. 392; <u>V</u>, p. 629.

CHAPTER THREE

ELIOT: OPENINGS AND CLOSURES

The open structures of modern art and of the associationist aesthetic makes of the poem a verbal space into which forces from beyond its own boundaries constantly flow. It is a focus towards which and from which there are dynamic movements of thought and memory which lie beyond the control of the work of art; beyond its control, that is, except that it exists only to generate such currents. The force of the work of art will depend on the power of the forces it draws into play, though the contents of those forces will not be determinable by the work itself. Both Eliot and Yeats were faced by a kind of art which, in the very act of practising, they found difficult to accept, and a possible way of viewing their careers is as a constant battle with the implications of their own poetic practice, a series of attempts to negate the openness of the works they were creating, or to control the forces which might enter the verbal spaces they had constructed. I want in this chapter to examine some of these attempts in Eliot's critical writings.

I Bradley

Eliot's indebtedness to Bradley has come to be generally acknowledged by critics since the publication, as Knowledge and Experience in the Philosophy of F.H. Bradley, of his 1916 doctoral dissertation.[1] Richard Wollheim has

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1 Knowledge and Experience in the Philosophy of F.H. Bradley (cited as K&E) was published after its recovery by Anne C. Bolgan; see her 'The Philosophy of F.H. Bradley and the Mind and Art of T.S. Eliot: An Introduction' in S.P. Rosenbaum, ed. English Literature and British Philosophy (London: University of Chicago, 1973). Other useful studies of Eliot's connections with Bradley are Richard Wollheim, 'Eliot and F.H. Bradley; an account' in Graham Martin, ed. Eliot in Perspective (London: Macmillan, 1970); Hugh Kenner, The Invisible Poet: T.S. Eliot (London: Methuen, 1965) and David Ward, T.S. Eliot Between Two Worlds (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1970).

cautioned us that 'to trace the influence of Bradley's philosophy upon Eliot any way beyond ... generalities seems ... a most hazardous undertaking'[1] and it is certainly difficult to establish direct connections between poetic presentation and a philosophical theory, especially when we cannot know exactly how much Bradley Eliot knew when he wrote his earliest, apparently Bradleian, poems, such as 'Prufrock' and 'Portrait of a Lady'. As David Ward suggests,[2] the relationship may be that the conception of the nature of human experience which is revealed by the poems in fact influenced Eliot into adopting Bradley's philosophy as his major study because Bradley's theories have similar concerns. My purpose, however, is not to connect Eliot's study of Bradley directly with his poetic practice so much as to outline the ways in which Bradley's philosophical conceptions are used by Eliot to theoretically close some of the structural openness which the associationist mode involves.

Eliot does not remain as close to - though he does not entirely eschew - the associationist terminology which is characteristic of Yeats's critical writings. Eliot's debt to Bradley's concept of redintegration divorced him from its implications. On the redintegrative model the past appears combined with present experience in a single gestalt rather than appearing as a chain of individual memories attached to the present stimulus. We cannot reach the meaning of the present experience by following out the logic of the associational train since there is no sequence of memories, the memories are already present in the object apprehended. Thus the establishment of the meaning of the experience is not identical with association but involves a

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1 Wollheim, 'T.S. Eliot: an account' in Martin, Eliot in Perspective, p. 189.

2 Ward, T.S. Eliot Between Two Worlds, p. 14.

separate act of cognition over and above the materials provided by redintegration. Any moment of experience, and Bradley calls all experiences 'feelings', is thus, ultimately, meaningless; in it past and present are entirely amalgamated, as indeed are subject and object. According to Bradley we have no way of distinguishing, in the moment of feeling, the subject who is conscious of an object and the object which is present to a subject, each is a part, but an undifferentiated part, of the gestalt. Thus the experience merely is, since to establish meaning we would have to distinguish in the experience the relations between subject and object, between past and present:

> In feeling the subject and object are one. The object becomes an object by its felt continuity with other feelings which fall outside the finite centre[1], and the subject becomes a subject by its felt continuity with a core of feeling which is not related to the object. But the point at which a line may be drawn is always a question for partial and practical interests to decide. Everything, from one point of view, is subjective; and everything, from another point of view, is objective; and there is no absolute point of view from which a decision may be pronounced. Hence any history of the process must be only relatively true: it must be a history of the object side, postulating the subject, or it must be a history of the subject side, postulating the object side. For feeling, in which the two are one, has no history; it is, as such, outside of time altogether, inasmuch as there is no point of view from which it can be inspected.[2]

As will be evident from this passage, the sense of subjectivity, of having an experience which is one's own experience, is dependent on a temporal perspective which separates the history of one's consciousness from any object it entertains. One has to establish a point of view which distinguishes self from other in the temporal continuum, though that point of view will

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1 'Finite centre' is a technical term describing a focus of consciousness: in most contexts it can be read as equivalent to 'self'.

2 K&E, pp. 21-22.

always be, to a certain extent, arbitrary. Knowing the object, qua object, and knowing oneself as a self are thus complementary movements of awareness: they are not given in experience but constructed out of given experience by the establishment of a point of view which separates them.

The construction of such a point of view is essentially the construction of a set of relations which define one's objects and define onself by according them meaning. Meaning is thus a function not of the experience itself - as it is in an associationist schema - but of the relations which the object supports external to itself. An object exists, in fact, in proportion to the extent of its external relations, since it is only in the development of a point of view that accords it such external relations that it is separated out of immediate experience into objectivity:

> In describing immediate experience we must use terms which offer a surreptitious suggestion of subject or object. If we say presentation, we think of a subject to which the presentation is present as an object. And if we say feeling, we think of it as the feeling of a subject about an object ... Nevertheless we can arrive at this metaphysical use of the term feeling in its psychological and current use, and show that 'feelings', which are real objects in a world of objects, are different from other objects, are feelings, because of their participation in the nature of feeling in this other sense. The feeling which is an object is a feeling shrunk and impoverished, though in a sense expanded as well: shrunk because it is now the object of consciousness, narrower instead of wider than consciousness; expanded because in becoming an object it has developed relations which lead beyond itself.[1]

The concept of feeling become an object is, of course, closely related to Eliot's later theory of the objective correlative, but what I want to emphasise here is that the object becomes an object by developing relations external to itself. It thereby separates itself from the matrix of immediate experience: it becomes an object of cognisance to a subject. But it can

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1 K&E, pp. 22-23.

only do so by an act of temporal recognition, an awareness that the relations which the object has are relations involving a history which is different from the subject's. Awareness thus always involves two different versions of any experience: one is the immediate experience, in which past and present, subject and object are united, and the other is the temporal perspective in which the object, as a separate entity, gains its meaning in relation to the connections with other objects that it can maintain. And there can be no resolution of these two poles of awareness: they remain forever mutually exclusive modes of apprehension.

More than that, however, despite being mutually exclusive, these two poles of awareness do not leave each other untouched, for once one has created a perspective, a point of view, in which objects are accorded existence and meaning, that point of view, and those meanings are part of the past which is compounded into the next moment of immediate experience. One is not aware of the perspective or the meanings and yet, by the redintegrative action, they are present as a part of any new gestalt. What one had separated out from a previous immediate experience thus returns to extend the complexity of each new awareness, but what will be separated out from this new experience, the new point of view, will itself be conditioned by what has been amalgamated into the immediate experience. Thus there is a constant process of amalgamating and differentiating experiences and points of view such that each conditions the nature of the other: each emerges as a function of what the previous point of view or the previous experience has embodied. In terms of the metaphysical development of awareness of self and other Eliot describes the process thus:

> In order that these developments - thought, will pleasure and pain, objects - may be possible, feeling must have been given and when these developments have arrived, feeling has expanded

> and altered so as to include them [Truth and Reality, p. 175: 'At every moment my state, whatever else it is, is a whole of which I am immediately aware. It is an experienced non-relational unity of many in one.'] This is what we mean by saying that feeling is self-transcendent.[1]

In terms of aesthetic experience the 'immediate non-relational unity of many in one' is the immediate experience of the work of art, an experience which involves and transcends all previous experience, including the points of view which we have constructed in order to make those previous experiences meaningful to us. The experience is *of* the present, but it includes within it that redintegratively compounded past which is present in all experience; this *gestalt* can only become an object - and therefore an object of knowledge - if we separate it from immediate experience by providing a point of view within which its external relations will be established, but that point of view, like previous points of view, will re-enter immediate experience as a part of later compounds. And, in addition, the experience which any individual human being has will begin from an already achieved historical platform of awareness belonging to the culture into which he is born.

The dialectic of awareness which this theory involves, it is important to stress, must be to a large extent, if not entirely, beyond the control of the individual. The self which he feels himself to be is itself a function of the differentiation of an original mass of feeling into subject and object, and, since the subject is one of the differentiated elements, it cannot have participated in the process of differentiation. At a higher level, the point of view with which one understands a given *gestalt* must itself have emerged from previous states of feeling and therefore be beyond the control

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1 K&E, pp. 20-21.

of the self which holds it. The self is a passive instrument of a metaphysical process which is the differentiation of feeling and the activity it has it has in virtue of the part it is expected to play in that process - the provision of points of view within which relations will be established between elements of immediate experience. The self is thus crucially dependent on the past. It is a function of all the differentiations of feeling which have preceded it; its immediate experience, through reintegration, is a constant experience of the past compounded with the present so that the two are indistinguishable; its knowledge is a function of the creation of a point of view which, essentially, is the construction of temporal connections revealing continuities that pass beyond the area of present experience. No moment of its awareness, therefore, is complete in itself, could be complete in itself: every moment is a complex interconnection of modes of awareness, of past and present, and there is no way in which a moment of experience can be had by itself, in itself.

The pattern of immediate experience that I have been outlining, and which is the central concern of Eliot's work on Bradley, is, I want to argue, the structuring pattern behind Eliot's early criticism. Immediate experience in its philosophical sense is not identical with aesthetic experience, but insofar as immediate experience is present in <u>any</u> moment of awareness it must equally be present in any moment of aesthetic experience. Whether the transfer is philsophically justified is not in question; Eliot, I suggest, used this account of all experience to justify certain special kinds of experience, aesthetic experience, and he used the Bradleian conception of meaning tied to this conception of experience - meaning as a function of a system of relations in the perspective of a point of view - as the basis of his

discussion of meaning in the arts.[1] I would even go so far as to suggest that one of the most persistent characteristics of Eliot's art, his use of allusion or the deliberate repetition of previous literary formulations, though not instigated by his philosophical theories, would certainly have found justification and support in them. Given his philosophical position, the use of previous literary material would be, not a matter of choice, but of metaphysical necessity: the process of differentiation of feeling demands that whatever has been previously 'objectified', whatever has been added to the system of relations, is the necessary background to the achievement of any new differentiation of feeling. The experience of the new work of art has to draw into itself the experience of past works of art in order to constitute itself as a real differentiation of feeling; at the same time the suggestion of past orders of literature provides the basic material from which a point of view can emerge which will be able to connect this work with all past work and so establish its external relations, its meaning and, therefore, ultimately, its existence. Without those external relations the work would never become an identifiable object, a separate entity, and the system of allusions creates the initial material for the construction of a relevant perspective within which it can become a meaningful object. Of course, the work itself cannot construct such a meaning - 'permanent literature is always a presentation'[2] - but by ensuring its connections with previous points of view, previous differentiations of feeling, it can facilitate the construction of a point of view.

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1 The transfer might also be explained by what Richard Wollheim suggests of all idealist philosophy, that 'what is asserted to be the case is often, in effect, the terminal condition or condition of perfection: a condition which is realised when the phenomenon in question, say emotion or language, has become everything that it is in it to be.' (Martin, Eliot in Perspective, p. 189).

2 'The Possibility of Poetic Drama', SW, p. 64.

Any actual point of view giving the work its meaning through its relations will always be the construction of some particular reader with his particular point of view. Just as, in the associationist framework, the work of art has to be filled out with the reader's own associations, so in redintegrative framework the gestalt of given elements, including associations, has to be made meaningful by the construction of a point of view which will relate it to the object side of experience. The work is not incomplete in the sense that an associationist theory would suggest but because there is no work apart from someone's experience of it, an experience which includes that person's associations; it is incomplete in the sense that the experience of it is only the experience of a single object once a point of view has established the relations within which the experience separates itself into subjective and objective. The object is complete but unidentifiable while it is experienced; incomplete but identifiable once it is placed in a point of view (incomplete in this case because no point of view can be ultimate): 'the meaning of a work is always relative to the world in which the reader lives, and to the reader's needs, desires and prejudices, to his knowledge and ignorance.'[1]

Even within an established point of view the work remains, as much as it does in the associationist context, a function of the individual's own situation: it is not his memories that the poem directly relies upon for its existence, but upon his ability to create a system of meanings. Thus, as the poem can only be completed, in the associationist scheme, by someone who has the relevant memories, so on Eliot's conception of it the poem can only be completed by someone with the relevant perspective connecting the immediate experience with the past, someone with the relevant point of view.

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1 'Commentary', Criterion, IV, 3 (June 1926), p. 628.

Not every point of view is of equal validity. The openness has appropriate and inappropriate closures which are defined in terms of a total view: 'it is part of (the critic's) business to see literature steadily and see it whole.'[1] 'Steadily' implies a single point of view; 'whole' implies an all encompassing one. Eliot, therefore, is not asserting a startling critical novelty - though no doubt it was that - but a truism of the Bradleian theory of meaning when he wrote in 'Tradition and the Individual Talent' that,

> No poet, no artist of any art, has his complete meaning alone. His significance, his appreciation is the appreciation of his relation to the dead poets and artists.[2]

And, equally, it is a function of his theory of meaning that the new work of art will create a new order among the 'ideal monuments' of past art, since the new work introduces a new relation into the total experience of the works and that new relation changes their meaning and, in effect, their very existence. The point of view in which the work exists - and it can only exist in some point of view - has been altered by the addition of new element to the total background from which any new gestalt under the stimulus of any work of art, new or old, will be formed.

The problem which we have seen to be central to the associationist scheme is, however, not resolved by this change: we are still faced by a plurality of possible responses, of possible points of view, and, therefore, the work of art has ceased to be a single thing. There can be no possibility of communication where the very existence of the work will be changed by the context of relations within which it is apprehended. What Eliot wants to

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1 'Introduction', SW, p. xv.

2 'Tradition and the Individual Talent', SE, p. 15.

distinguish in his earliest essays is the associationist response of the reader who is 'unable to distinguish the poetry from an emotional state aroused in himself by the poetry, a state which may be an indulgence of his own emotions'[1], and the reader whose perceptions do not 'accumulate as a mass, but form themselves into a structure'.[2] For the former each emotion is isolated, contingent, accidental, whereas for the latter the meaning of the poem is established as part of a total pattern of relations. How we can distinguish between the relevance of different total patterns remains, however, to be elucidated.

The same problem can be observed in Eliot's writings in relation to the poet as well as the critic: how does the poet avoid creating a work which can only be appreciated on the level of collisions between parts of the work and isolated associations of the reader's? How does the poet construct a work which will be able to fit into a structure of perceptions rather than acting as a stimulus to isolated emotions? Eliot's introduction of the concept of 'maturity' covers precisely this ground. For Eliot the mature poet is the one whose work demands a point of view, a historical perspective, if we are to appreciate it at all; he is a poet whose work cannot be experienced merely as an emotional reaction. The poem reveals a real stage in the differentiation of feeling and, therefore, can only be comprehended by an act of awareness which encompasses the sense of a developing system in the world parallel to its awareness of its own developing system. Eliot implies this distinction in his discussion of Herbert and Vaughan:

> To appreciate Herbert's sensibility we have to penentrate the thought and emotion of the time; we should know Andrewes and

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1 SW, P. 14.

2 SW, p. 15.

> Hooker. In short the emotion of Herbert is clear, definite, mature and sustained; whereas the emotion of Vaughan is vague, adolescent, fitful and retrogressive.[1]

Vaughan's emotion is retrogressive because it does not add to the differentiation of feeling: it offers us something which is not founded on the past but will be everywhere and always the same. It is an emotion with no history, like the emotions of adolescence, and it is this distinction which Eliot invoked in his apparently paradoxical statement that 'immature poets imitate, mature poets steal'.[2] The immature poet uses the past as a reflection of his own emotions, of the level of feeling which he - and it - has already achieved, whereas the mature poet steals in order to further the differentiation of feeling, building from the materials of the past a new level of feeling, 'a whole of feeling which is unique'.[3] But again we are brought back to the central problem of how we can resolve the possible plurality of perspectives which are thus created: why is such a point of view any the less subjective than someone's emotional response? How do we distinguish valid from invalid points of view?

The problem turns on what is the most famous aspect of Eliot's critical theorising, the impersonal theory of poetry.[4] It is perhaps significant that Eliot's first theoretical statement of this theory is made not in terms of

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1 'The Silurist', The Dial, 83 (September 1927), p. 259.

2 'Philip Massinger', SE, p. 206.

3 Ibid.

4 The fullest study of Eliot's aesthetic, one which takes this aspect as central, is Mowbray Allen, T.S. Eliot's Impersonal Theory of Poetry (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 1974). Allen alludes to the associationist perspective, see pp. 89-92, but takes no account of its Bradleian base in redintegration. Fei-Pai Lu, T.S. Eliot: The Dialectical Structure of his Poetry (Chicago, 1966) offers a much firmer grasp on the Idealist background and its implications.

'impersonality', but in terms of 'de-personalization' and that the context was that of his famous - or notorious - analogy of the catalyst:

> There remains to define this process of depersonalization and its relation to the sense of tradition. It is in this depersonalization that art may be said to approach the condition of science. I therefore invite you to consider, as a suggestive analogy, the action which takes place when a bit of finely filiated platinum is introduced into a chamber containing oxygen and sulphur dioxide.[1]

The sense of this analogy is very difficult to establish. David Ward suggests that Eliot uses science here 'as a kind of charm to dispel Georgian emotionalism and the spinelessly decadent Romantic theory that went with it'.[2] The essay certainly seems to ask us to see 'science' in positivistic terms, as a set of operations undeflected by the involvement of the human personality which constructs and uses it. In fact, however, in terms of Eliot's work on Bradley, this is not his view of science and it is difficult to imagine that in the course of two years he had forgotten the implications of a significant part of his philosophical thinking. For Bradley, and Eliot agrees with him in this, the truth of science lies not in its statements being impersonally in correspondence with some set of events in the world, nor in the purity of its experimental techniques, but in the coherence of a certain point of view towards the world. What science does is to assert as real, and therefore as objective, only some aspect of the totality of the universe, of the developments of feeling. For even scientific experiments are part of

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1 'Tradition and the Individual Talent', SE, p. 17. Eliot's use of the scientific analogy may have been prompted by his sense of its fashionable aura: it is used regularly by de Gourmont, but, perhaps more importantly, appears often in Pound's writings during this period. See, for instance, 'The Serious Artist' (1913), in T.S. Eliot, ed. The Literary Essays of Ezra Pound (London: Faber, 1954), p. 41 ff.

2 Ward, T.S. Eliot Between Two Worlds, p. 53.

the metaphysical development of 'feeling', though, as Eliot admits, 'it is hard to disabuse ourselves of the prejudice that feeling is something subjective and private, and it affects only what feels, not what is felt'.[1] The scientific field is not, therefore, a feelingless area of human concern and it cannot be separated off from other areas of human existence. In fact, for Eliot, the sciences exist only relatively, asserting their objectivity by an implicit relegation of all the other sciences to a limbo of mere appearances:

> The attitude of science, then, involves the constitution of a larger and larger limbo of appearances - a larger field of reality which is referred to the subjective side of experience. Economics is appearance to the biologist, biology for the chemist.[2]

The relationship of each science to the others Eliot describes in terms of points of view: each science asserts a coherent point of view towards the world and its development within that point of view is 'rather organic than mechanical'.[3] The truths of science are, therefore, objective, impersonal, only in being coherently part of a process of dividing reality into the real and apparent; from another point of view, the point of view of another science, they are subjective.

This being the case, the implied obeisance that Eliot makes to the sciences is itself more apparent than real: the sciences have already been assimilated to the kind of structure which we tend to think of as belonging to the arts. The objectivity of the sciences towards which the poet should aspire is, in effect, a form of subjectivity:

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1 K&E, p. 21.

2 K&E, p. 73.

3 Ibid.

> We intend from our divers limited points of view a single real world, and we forget that metaphysically this real world is only real as it finds realisation through these points of view.[1]

The corollary is that the real world is objective only in so far as it is fulfilled in such a point of view:

> ... the objective world is only actual in one or another point of view, but ... each point of view intends to be, not a point of view, but the world one and impersonal.[2]

In other words, the world 'one and impersonal' is never achieved: there is no absolute beyond the 'limited points of view' from which we regard the world but which, when they are sufficiently coherent, as in the case of the sciences, we can take for the world. It is precisely this sense of the point of view and the construction of an impersonal world which I think we see in Eliot's critical theory. It is, for instance, in these terms that Eliot distinguishes Conrad's work from Kipling's and Swinburne's:

> Mr Conrad has no ideas, but he has a point of view, a 'world'; it can hardly be defined, but it pervades his work and is unmistakeable.[3]

For Eliot the achievement of 'impersonality' is not, in fact, an avoidance of the subjective, but by making that subjective awareness coherent and able to present itself as 'the world' it ceases to appear as a personal point of view and becomes one of the modes through which the objective world has the only existence it can have.

The impersonal is thus not a state divorced from the personal; rather it is a development of the personal beyond the limits of what we - perhaps arbitrarily - decide is subjective. The coherence of the point of view is,

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1 K&E, p. 90.

2 Ibid.

3 'Kipling Redivivus', The Athenaeum, 4645 (9 May, 1919), p. 297.

however, only one aspect of the transcendence of the subjective. It is the aspect which Eliot emphasises in relation to Conrad and in his essay on Jonson:

> The 'world' of Jonson is sufficiently large; it is a world of poetic imagination; it is sombre. He did not get the third dimension, but he was not trying to get it.[1]

One can transcend the subjective and thereby achieve impersonality without fully leaving oneself behind. The third dimension depends on not only making one's point of view 'a world', but in making it correspond to the world as it is developing in history. Not, of course, that there is a single world, but there is the world as it appears from the point of view of one's total culture, a higher level point of view than any individual point of view, no matter how coherent. The point of view which offers us a world can perhaps be regarded as the synchronic requirement; beyond that is the diachronic fulfilment of the point of view which completes the evolution of the world, the point of view of its whole culture. In Knowledge and Experience Eliot suggests that a fact, something asserted to be true of or to exist in the world, is such only in the context of a coherent point of view:

> Facts are not merely found in the world and laid together like bricks, but every fact has in a sense its place prepared for it before it arrives, and without the implication of a system in which it belongs the fact is not a fact at all.[2]

The fact is thus not only part of a system from a point of view, but, as it were, enters the world through the point of view. The point of view as a coherent system projects the nature of the facts which can be and will be accommodated in the future. The dialectic between past and present

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1 'Ben Jonson', SE, p. 159.

2 K&E, p. 60.

is thus mutually determining:[1] the point of view in the present creates an order among the events of the past, but in turn that order projects the kind of facts which will fit into the system in the future.

It is at this higher level of mutually determining past and present that the closure of the open structure of the work of art occurs in Eliot's theory. The pattern I have been outlining is the pattern of 'Tradition and the Individual Talent'. The personal becomes impersonal by integrating itself into the point of view of its whole culture. That culture only is a total structure, only has a particular shape in some perspective of the present, but the perspective of the present is itself a fact - and 'facts' for Eliot are 'ideal constructions' just as works of art are 'ideal monuments' - projected by the pattern of the past. Thus the pattern we descry among the ideal monuments is a pattern from our point of view, but the appropriate point of view is the one projected by the pattern of the past so that our new point of view coheres and conforms. The immediate experience of the new work of art is a function of a new differentiation of feeling, but the meaning of that new differentiation can only be known through a critical perspective which is itself a projection of past differentiations of feeling. The new work and the new critical perspective are thus complementary: each is the fulfilment of a place already prepared by the development of the system and yet each defines the nature of the system and so prepares the ground for the next leap forward. It is the developing totality of the system (in some point of view) which determines the appropriate perspective in which to

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1 Cf. Bradley, The Presuppositions of Critical History (Oxford, 1874), p. 153: '... history then ... in the last resort has existence as history, as record of events, by means of an inference of our own. And this inference furthermore can never start from a background of nothing; it is never a fragmentary and isolated act of our mind, but is essentially connected with and in entire dependence on the state of our general consciousness. And so the past varies with the present and can never do otherwise.'

establish the meaning of any particular - and therefore of all - literary creations.

There are thus two correlated processes. Firstly, there is the creation or experience of the work of art, an element of immediate experience which is produced through a differentiation of the feeling already objectified and achieved by past art. This work is created out of previous levels of feeling, including the points of view which were constructed to make those feelings meaningful. It is, as it were, the object entertained by the mind of its culture at some particular moment, though since no mind is anything but the objects it entertains it also is the mind of its culture at that moment. That mind can only be a developing mind, therefore, if the works it entertains are themselves a development of each other, and they can only be such if there is some point of view in which their immediate experience is placed and provided with relations. The establishment of the relations is the second process, making the immediate experience meaningful and thereby laying the direction for the emergence of the next experience, the next work of art. When a work fits into this pattern of mutually buttressing experiences and relationships it ceases to be attached to the individual who produced it and becomes a part of the higher level mind of the whole culture, the 'mind of Europe - the mind of his own country'.[1] The personal, both in creative and critical terms, becomes impersonal, therefore, by fitting in with this developing pattern. The work cannot be accounted an accidental or contingent experience because it participates in the historical fulfilment of the basic ontological process of the universe, the differentiation of feeling. And that process, since there is 'a mind of Europe', a single mind, must prove

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1 'Tradition and the Individual Talent', SE, p. 16.

to be unilinear. The multiplicity of individual points of view must be resolved into this single, higher point of view. The openness of the relations which can be constructed from any individual point of view has disappeared in the determining projections of the single mind of Europe. The works which constitute that mind must reveal within themselves their own possibility of relations or it will itself become, like the mind of the emotional reader of poetry, a place of accidents and confusion, no longer a part of the real processes of the world as it ought to be. Multiplicity has disappeared into a single process of development: the coherence of any individual point of view is relegated in favour of its coherence with a higher point of view. We can see the effect of Eliot's theory in the following passage from a review of Edward Garnett's Turgenev in which Eliot complains that Garnett 'leaves us without attempting to settle the relation of Turgenev's literary form to his human position as an incarnation of European culture'.[1] Turgenev's point of view as an individual human being disappears in the point of view of the whole culture; Garnett, however, has failed in the essential aspect of criticism because he has failed to outline those relations among the works of the past which will constitute the projecting pattern into which any new work, any progress beyond Turgenev's level of differentiation of feeling, must fit.

It is the concept of this higher level mind, this totality into which the individual must fit (but which will be transformed by his fitting) that removes the openness from Eliot's conceptions of the external relations of the work of art. Because he can postulate such a high level mind he can offer, in 'Tradition and the Individual Talent', a conception of the whole

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1 The Egoist, IV, 2 (December 1917), p. 167.

process of literature as self-directing, as no longer dependent on a particular point of view: 'The existing monuments form an ideal order among themselves, which is modified by the introduction of the new (the really new) work of art among them.'[1] The reason for the passive here - 'is modified' - and for the suggestion that the works perform this act by themselves, is that the critical perspective in which that modification occurs, the point of view in which the relations are established, has itself been subsumed into this higher level mind and ceased to exist as an individual occurrence. The critical procedure achieves its impersonality by closing off the possibilities which the creative procedure opens, and each justifies the fulfilment in the other of a unilinear historical development.

Just as the work of art is translated into impersonality by inner coherence and by its external coherence with the development of past art, so the critical perspective achieves identity with the 'mind of Europe' by its coherence and its fulfilment of previous perspectives. Thus, although there are a multitude of potential points of view, only one will, at any particular moment in history, confirm the totality and unity of the culture: it will be, for that moment, the mind of its culture, the highest differentiation of the external relations of all the works that constitute the culture. A theoretical multiplicity disappears into a historically relative, but nonetheless total, uniformity.

II History

In a review in The Athenaeum in 1919 Eliot provided a broader picture of the idea of a total system than he had offered in 'Tradition and the Individual Talent':

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1 SE, p. 15.

> ...when we assume that a literature exists we assume a great deal: we suppose that there is one of the five or six (at most) great organic formations of history. We do not suppose merely 'a history', for there might be a history of Tamil literature, but a part of History, which for us is the history of Europe. We suppose not only a corpus of writings in one language, but writings and writers between whom there is a tradition; and writers who are not merely connected by a tradition in time, but who are related so as to be in the light of eternity contemporaries, from a certain point of view, cells in one body.[1]

The dialectic between the 'point of view' and the single actuality of a developing process is maintained by this passage: the 'certain point of view' is evidently not only a point of view, but the appropriate point of view, since it is the one which reveals the lineaments of 'History", the real progress of human development. It is in order to be a part of History and not, like the response of the emotional reader, an accident of history that the writer must build his work in terms of what has preceded him. The writer must, therefore, conform to the underlying principles of one of the 'five or six (at most) great organic formations of history', though he must also ensure that he advances that organic process:

> To conform merely would be for the new work not really to conform at all; it would not be new, and would therefore not be a work of art. And we do not quite say that the new is more valuable becuase it fits in; but its fitting in is a test of its value - a test, it is true, which can only slowly and cautiously be applied, for we are none of us infallible judges of conformity.[2]

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1 'Was there a Scottish Literature?', The Athenaeum, 4657 (1 August, 1919), p. 680. Eliot did not see that there was a Scottish literature, since it was not one of the great organic formations of history. In 1943, however, under very different circumstances, and addressing the British-Norwegian Institute - Norway would certainly have come under a similar ban in 1919 - he offered a less antagonistic appraisal in a lecture later published as 'The Social Function of Poetry' (OPAP, p. 15). In the latter he gives Scottish, Irish and Welsh literatures a place within the English organism. It is interesting to compare Yeats's rather different drawing of literary boundaries in his version of the great literary organisms of the world; see Frayne I, p. 85.

2 'Tradition and the Individual Talent', SE, p. 15.

The conformity is not a conformity with one's time - Tennyson, according to Eliot, is 'an example of a poet wholly encrusted with parasitic opinion, almost wholly merged into his environment'[1] - but conformity with the process of History, which is by no means identical with the pattern of history. The former is an ideal construction conformity with which may well leave one alienated from the latter, as is revealed in Eliot's review of the Sitwell's anthology Wheels in 1919:

> Every one of the writers of Wheels must make a choice. They can either hang together, and make a small place for themselves in the history of literature by being the interesting fashion of a day, or they can choose to run the risk of being individuals. If they choose the former they will live to see a new and perhaps worse fashion succeed theirs. If they will make the choice of standing each for himself, some of them will instantly disappear in oblivion, the rest will have the opportunity of being lonely and unappreciated and above the possible mutations of public taste.[2]

Eliot's sense that the artist who 'conforms' must necessarily be 'lonely and unappreciated' in his own time suggests that History and history are entirely independent of each other. It is, however, the artist's relationship with history, with the ideal construction and the actualities of his own time, that I want to deal with now in Eliot's thought.

The necessary relationship between past and present which is involved in the ontological and psychological theory of poetry that Eliot had developed from his Bradleian background had to find its feet also in the realities of the actual course of history, the nature of the relationship between a particular present and a particular past. Eliot's conception of the lonely and unappreciated artist might suggest that the extinction of the personality which belongs to history is the necessary precondition of the act of creation

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1 'William Blake', SE, p. 319.

2 'The Post-Georgians', The Athenaeum, 4641 (11 April, 1919), p. 172.

which will be a part of History. In fact, however, this is not the case: for Eliot there was always, though it often went unstated in the early essays, a deep connection between History and history. Thus, for instance, only a month after his review of Wheels Eliot was arguing in The Egoist that his friend Conrad Aiken suffered from the enforced isolation of living in America: 'if Mr Aiken were not so isolated, if he was in contact with European civilisation, he would go very much further'.[1] The emphasis on 'civilisation' might suggest a connection only with History, but if contact depends on physical location as well as an intellectual point of view then it must also be deeply embedded in 'history'. Isolation in itself is insufficient.[2] Eliot also argued that the American environment encouraged in writers such as Hawthorne and Poe, and pre-eminently in Whitman, an 'originality' denied to writers closer to the heart of civilisation, but at the same time they gained the originality at the expense of a crucial impoverishment owing to the 'defect of society in the larger sense'.[3] Society as a part of history is therefore always an essential requirement of the artistic process.

We must not be deceived by Eliot's early insistence on separating literature from other aspects of life into thinking that literature was in

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1 'Reflections on Contemporary Poetry', The Egoist, VI, 6 (July 1919), p. 40.

2 Eliot, however, is willing to allow that physical isolation can be a useful corrective in certain cases. He suggests of J.B. Yeats that 'he is always the solitary man, talking for one listener. Perhaps New York encircling the writer with loneliness, has done him a service.' The Egoist, IV, 6 (July 1917), pp. 89-90, in a review of the letters of J.B. Yeats.

3 'American Literature', The Athenaeum, 4643 (25 April, 1919), p. 236.

fact, for him, a separate, self-determining area of human experience. Eliot's position had always been what he had asserted it to be in 1928 when, writing on F.L. Lucas's work on Webster, Eliot suggested that Lucas was 'apt to lean towards a type of error which is not uncommon in literary criticism: that of confusing literary questions with others, such as moral, philosophical or religious', and went on to insist that 'it is not that these matters are unconnected, but that we must keep them separate in order to see the connections'.[1] Eliot's mode of seeing the connections between art and history had, in his early essays, remained concealed by his insistence on keeping their boundaries in view, but the connection is there nonetheless. It operates consistently in terms of a negative condition in explaining the failure of certain types of art or artists; it reveals why they have failed to keep the different areas of their experience separate. Discussing George Wyndham in 'Imperfect Critics', Eliot takes him as an instance of the kind of critic who confuses separate aspects of experience:

> From these and other sentences we chart the mind of George Wyndham, and the key to its topography is the fact that his literature and his politics and his country life are one and the same thing. They are not separate compartments in the one career.[2]

The failure to achieve such an appropriate separation of disciplines is not, however, a merely intellectual failing, it is a failure of the whole social world of which he is a part:

> We can criticize his writings only as the expression of this peculiar English type, the aristocrat, the Imperialist, the Romantic, riding to hounds across his prose, looking with wonder upon the world as upon a fairyland.[3]

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1 Criterion, VII, 4 (June 1928), p. 156.

2 SW, p. 26.

3 Ibid., p. 28.

The social situation has thus prevented Wyndham from achieving that individuality essential to great artists and critics alike; the social world is a negative imposition on sensibility by encouraging those aspects of literary response which can never be anything but accidents in History: 'And emotional people - such as stockbrokers, politicians, men of science - and a few people who pride themselves on being unemotional - detest or applaud great writers such as Spinoza or Stendhal because of their frigidity'.[1] In the end the correct emotional context - and the correct context of associations - is available only to those who are divorced from social utility: 'there is only one man better and more uncommon than the patrician, and that is the Individual.'[2]

Such freedom from the negative imposition of society upon one's sensibility is, in the end, a matter not of personal choice but of luck, the luck of being born patrician or the luck of a situation in which history does not impose too strongly upon one. The crucial case for Eliot's discussion of this situation is Blake. His essay on Blake in The Sacred Wood conceals beneath its distanced tone a profound personal disturbance.[3] Blake is ranked, despite his Romantic connections, with Homer and Aeschylus, Dante and Shakespeare - and then denied that ranking. The reason behind the essay's shift in evaluation lies in Blake's evident refusal to conform to the developing mainstream of English - and European - cultural life, his refusal to acknowledge the virtue of the past. Eliot is intrigued to discover what 'the circumstances [were] that

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1 'The Perfect Critic', SW, p. 15.

2 'Imperfect Critics', SW, p. 32.

3 See Ernest J. Lovell, Jr., 'The Heretic in the Sacred Wood; or the Naked Man, the Tired Man and the Romantic Aristocrat: William Blake, T.S. Eliot and George Wyndham', in Romantic and Victorian:Studies in Memory of William H. Marschall, Paul Elledge and Richard L. Hoffman, ed. (New Jersey: Harleigh Dickinson, 1971), p. 75.

concurred to permit this honesty in his work and what circumstances define its limitations.'[1] In this statement the social conditioning seems to have a positive role to play, permitting certain achievements, but in effect it turns out to be the negative effects which Eliot emphasises. Blake's social situation denied him the acculturation which a higher social position would have allowed him:

> ... being early apprenticed to a manual occupation, he was not compelled to acquire any other education in literature than he wanted, or to acquire it for any other reason than that he wanted it, and that, being a humble engraver, he had no journalistic-social career open to him.
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> There was, that is to say, nothing to distract him from his interests or to corrupt these interests: neither the ambitions of parents or wife, nor the standards of society, nor the temptations of success.[2]

This was originally published in The Athenaeum in 1920, when Eliot's own affairs were rapidly developing towards that breakdown which resulted in his going to Switzerland and to the writing of 'The Waste Land'. The view of Blake as a free spirit in a way that Eliot himself was not had at once to be acknowledged (though humbleness would hardly constitute sufficient evidence for saying that Blake was free from social and family pressures) and then denied. Blake's freedom from the kind of social experience which Eliot had had is turned into the deficiency of his art, his social situation denies him the preconditions necessary to full artistic excellence.

> We have the same respect for Blake's philosophy ... that we have for an ingenious piece of home-made furniture: we admire the man who has put it together out of the odds and ends about the house. England has produced a fair number of these Robinson

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1 'William Blake', SE, p. 317. The essay appeared in The Sacred Wood as 'Blake' and originally in The Athenaeum, 4685 (13 February, 1920), p. 208, as 'The Naked Man'. Eliot later took a similar attitude to Lawrence: 'The point is that Lawrence started life wholly free from any restriction of tradition or institution, that he had no guidance except the Inner Light, the most untrustworthy and deceitful guide ...' After Strange Gods (London: Faber,1934), p. 59.

2 SE, pp. 317-318.

> Crusoes; but we are not really so remote from the Continent, or from our own past, as to be deprived of the advantages of culture if we wish them.[1]

Eliot's assumption of an English identity for the purposes of this essay - he is no isolated American, though by being an American he is saved from being any particular English type - is significant. His own career can be seen as fulfilling what he considers to be the demand of the arts upon the artist, that 'a man shall dispose of all that he has, even of his family tree and follow art alone'.[2] But in effect the people who achieve that freedom will be those already living in circumstances which favour such a renunciation. Leonardo, for instance, is one who 'had no father to speak of, ... was hardly a citizen, and he had no stake in the community'.[3] Such negative conditions - and might they apply to Eliot, who wrote that he had never felt at home anywhere?[4] - release the artist into that lonely isolation in which he can discover the real History to which he must conform, but they remain tied to the actual history in which he lives and through which he discovers his own purposes.

When Eliot chose the essays to be included in Selected Essays, his separation of 'Tradition and the Individual Talent' from the other essays of The Sacred Wood gave a much greater emphasis to the neutral, scientific concept of the writer than it had had in the earlier collection. By not reprinting 'The Perfect Critic' and 'Imperfect Critics' Eliot took away the correlative emphasis on the negative conditioning of social factors upon

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1 SE, p. 321.

2 'Imperfect Critics', The Sacred Wood, p. 32.

3 Ibid., p. 27.

4 See Eliot's letter to Herbert Read, quoted in Allen Tate, ed. T.S. Eliot: The Man and his Work, (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1967), p. 15.

achievement in the arts that runs through much of his early critical writing: Blake fails for reasons that can be attributed to his social position; Tennyson fails because though his verse 'is a "cry from the heart" ... it is the heart of Tennyson, Latitudinarian, Whig, Laureate';[1] Morris has 'a "style like speech", only it is the speech of Morris and therefore rather poor stuff.'[2] The fact that art is 'an escape from personality'[3] does not merely entail that the successful artist has been more technically proficient, but that he has succeeded by achieving the highest pinnacle of personality - which is to pass beyond personality: 'but, of course, only those who have a personality and emotions know what it means to want to escape from these things.'[4] The personal achievement is presented as just that - a personal achievement, and yet, if any failure can be explained negatively by social factors, must we not accept that success too will have its appropriate social explanations, even if we are not as interested in the explanation in the case of successfully fulfilled art? It was a problem which Eliot would come increasingly to face.

The crux of the matter, however, is revealed in Eliot's discussion of H.G. Wells. Eliot wrote:

> Mr Wells has not an historical mind; he has a prodigious gift of the historical imagination, which is comparable with Carlyle's, but this is quite a different thing from the understanding of history. That demands a degree of culture, civilization and maturity which Mr Wells does not possess.[5]

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1 The Egoist, IV, 10 (November, 1917), p. 151.

2 Ibid.

3 SE, p. 21.

4 'Tradition and the Individual Talent', SE, p. 21.

5 'Popular Theologians', Criterion, V, 2 (May 1927), p. 253.

The trinity of 'culture, civilization and maturity' is not available to the draper's assistant, scientist, parvenu writer Wells, though one might have imagined few writers could claim with more justification that they had to leave their whole background behind in order to become artists. Wells's failure is attributable to deficiencies of mind, but those qualities he lacks are dependent on a certain kind of social experience to which he had no access. They are not merely comments upon his type of mind, but upon his background - ultimately on his social class. Had he belonged to another social class he would have been able to see history not in terms of imaginative reconstructions of isolated moments, but in terms of a single, unfolding tradition. His point of view does not permit such a perspective, however, because the precondition of 'culture, civilization and maturity' is, as Eliot described it in his essay on Marvell, 'an educated mind, rich in generations of experience.'[1] The implications of 'educated' are, for Eliot, elitist;[2] generations of experience belong with aristocracies who remember their past generations. Wells's failure is the failure to belong to, or to find a way of aligning himself with, that class whose business is the same as the poet's - 'to preserve the continuity of life.'[3]

Thus social conditions, a particular social location, are in effect a positive determinant of poetic excellence: they do not guarantee it, but they make it possible, as their lack makes it impossible. The poet needs a social class which will preserve the continuity of history as it is his function to preserve the continuity of History: each depends upon the other.

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1 'Andrew Marvell', SE, p. 303.

2 See Notes towards the Definition of Culture, ch. VI; e.g. 'It follows ... that education should help to preserve the class and select the elite.' (p. 101).

3 Criterion, V, 2 (May 1927), p. 122, in a review of various works on language, particularly H.W. Fowler, Modern English Usage.

Each is engaged in preserving and advancing the differentiation of feeling and, therefore, the real purpose of human life in time. That Eliot had, perhaps quite quickly, left his Bradleian philosophy behind him does not mean that such terminology is no longer appropriate: the structure of Bradley's thought remains the framework upon which Eliot's later development is stretched and 'feeling', becoming perhaps ever more vague, remains a central term in his critical vocabulary. The closure of a unilinear point of view establishing the nature of History is repeated by Eliot in the less philosophical context of his later writings: history, itself, properly understood, becomes a unilinear precondition of the arts. Poetic achievement can be founded only on evolving structures of culture in history and every effort must be made to ensure that that history is unified, that the culture it supports does not become plural:

> a growing weakness of our culture has been the increasing isolation of élites from each other, so that the political, the philosophical, the artistic, the scientific, are separated to the great loss of each of them ... The problem of the formation, preservation and development of élites is therefore also the problem of the formation, preservation and development of the élite.[1]

From a conception of a History which was the function of a point of view, unifying and making coherent, Eliot moves to a conception of history which has to be made to support such unity and coherence by political action. The possibility of the former is no longer posited on the metaphysical base of a dialectic of points of view and experiences, but on the deliberate control of the development of the social organism itself. In order to prevent the open work of art from being open, one has to prevent the society from developing a multiplicity of points of view. There is nothing accidental

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1 Notes towards the Definition of Culture, p. 38.

or merely tempermanetal about Eliot's political conservatism: it is a coherent complement to his aesthetic concerns, it is the completion of his critical position and the inevitable outcome of the contradiction inherent in his development of the associationist principle in art. Such a political position was the only one possible when the artist felt the nature of his own art, the possibility of its achieving an appropriate response, was being undermined by the failure of society. It could be held a fault in Blake that he did not seek a European culture, since it was there to hand, but what happens when there is no suitable location for the artist? How do we create a work of art, and once created how can it enter into a full existence in the mind of a reader, when the pre-conditions of such existence are violated by the history of our own time? What happens when history is cut off from History?

It was precisely this situation which Eliot felt he faced in the 'twenties and 'thirties. He defines it in a Criterion 'Commentary' of 1926, in the immediate aftermath of the General Strike:

> The artist in the modern world, as Mr. I.A. Richards pointed out in The Criterion of July 1925, is heavily hampered in ways that the public does not understand. He finds himself, if he is a man of intellect, unable to realise his art to his own satisfaction, and he may be driven to examining elements in the situation - political, philosophical, or religious - which frustrate his labour. In this uncomfortable pursuit he is accused of 'neglecting his art'. But it is likely that some of the strongest influences on the thought of the next generation may be those of dispossessed artists.[1]

It is only in the context of an at least moderately healthy culture that Eliot's earlier concern with the separation of art from other aspects of life and with the individuality of artist is possible. Art may be separate, but it is not self-sustaining, and in the context of an ailing culture it is the external factors, the negative conditions, which come to be paramount

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1 'Commentary', Criterion, IV, 3 (June 1926), p. 420.

for both critic and artist. Eliot reiterated the same concern a year later:

> The man of letters today is interested in a great many subjects - not because he has many interests, but because he finds that the study of his own subject leads him irresistibly to the study of others; and he must study the others if only to disentangle his own, to find out what he is really doing himself.[1]

He goes on, in the same piece, to suggest that the central historical events which the artist has to take into account are the Russian Revolution, Italian Fascism and the Vatican's condemnation of Charles Maurras' Action Francaise organisation:

> All of these events compel us to consider the problem of Liberty and Authority, both in politics and in the organisation of speculative thought. Politics is too serious a matter to be left to the politicians.[2]

The entry of the artist directly in the political fray of history in order to preserve the values of History is made imperative by the condition of the time, by the fact that he cannot be an artist. The process to which the artist is committed, the process of immediate experience and its understanding, has been defiled, and an active engagement is necessary in order to make that dialectic once again possible. The political activity is directed towards establishing the limits of political activity, establishing an Authority which will remove the need for such activity and return to the artist his necessary passivity and conformity with the underlying process of History. The self-directing pattern of 'Tradition and the Individual Talent', re-organising itself beyond the intervention of any particular point of view, has given way to an active determination to impose a point of view in order that the tradition itself can continue to exist.

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1 'Commentary', Criterion, VI, 5 (November 1927), p. 386.

2 Ibid.

III The Unconscious

Eliot's choice of Liberty and Authority as the crucial issue of the day is significant in that it is precisely the problem posed by the associationist theory in the aesthetic realm: the social problem Eliot feels himself to face is identical with the aesthetic problem of an art which encourages but cannot accept that multitude of individual responses which it makes possible. Eliot's refusal of such individuality of response is not merely, however, the reflex of a temperamental aversion to democracy or individualism, it is deeply connected with Eliot's sense of the purpose of an associationist art. Without some common basis of association the associative process, Eliot feels, would cease to be a freedom from the utilities of our quotidian habits and would represent a more profound kind of trap. If association is to be liberating it must pass beyond the limits of our individual experience, allow us to discover reaches of the mind which are more extensive than our own. In terms of the 'point of view' the individual point of view is subsumed into the point of view of the whole culture, but the Bradleian sense of evolving structures of greater and greater complexity and sophistication is matched in Eliot's thinking by a parallel but opposite movement, a movement towards simplicity and a primitive reintegration. On the one hand we have the differentiation of feeling achieved by building upon the foundations of the past, on the other we have the rediscovery of basic levels of feeling through the recall of the past. These complementary movements towards an integration of the totality of the past with the present are only possible, Eliot thinks, where the channels towards the past are kept open and remain greater than any individual memory. Eliot does not invoke any such terminology as Yeats's Great Memory but his conception is similar: quantitative associative

richness is only possible if the mind can draw on more than its own experience for the provision of memories in the face of aesthetic stimuli.

In 1919 Eliot wrote several essays in which he used very similar images in describing the nature of poetic language and the sources of power on which they draw. The writers of North America, Eliot feels, suffer from having an insufficient past on which to depend:

> Poe and Whitman, like bulbs in a glass bottle could only exhaust what was in them. Hawthorne, more tentacular and inquisitive, sucked every actual germ of nourishment out of his granite soil; but the soil was mostly granite.[1]

The same image reappears in Eliot's discussion of Ben Jonson, whom he contrasts with Shakespeare, Donne and Webster because the work of these latter writers has 'a network of tentacular roots reaching down to the deepest terrors and desires.'[2] In comparison, Eliot suggests that 'the blossoms of Beaumont and Fletcher's imagination draw no sustenance from the soil, but are cut and slightly withered flowers stuck into sand.'[3] The distinction Eliot is making is in the depth of awareness of life which different works reveal, an awareness of all that lies beyond our ordinary selves, but, as the rest of the essay makes clear, such awareness is integral with the associationist principle of language. The language of Beaumont and Fletcher works through an 'evocative quality' which 'depends upon a clever appeal to emotions and associations which they themselves have not grasped; it is hollow.'[4] The opposite is a poetry in which the unconscious is at work to produce associations which do reach down

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1 'American Literature', The Athenaeum, 4643 (25 April, 1919), p. 237.

2 'Ben Jonson', SE, p. 155; originally published in the Times Literary Supplement (November 13, 1919), p. 637 as a review of G. Gregory Smith, Ben Jonson.

3 Ibid.

4 SE, p. 156.

into the very depths of our existence: Eliot contrasts Jonson's work with successful poetry of this kind by suggesting that in Jonson 'unconscious does not respond to unconscious; no swarms of inarticulate feelings are aroused.'[1] The power of the associations will depend on how deep into the psyche the words and images go to derive their meanings: the more of the unconscious that is brought into play the more extensive will be the quantitative provision of associations and the more powerful will be their content. The associative potential of language is thus dependent on reaching beyond the personal memory of the individual towards a more basic level of the mind which is common to us all.

For Eliot, however, as with many of his contemporaries, the journey into the depths of the mind is equivalent to a journey into the depths of the past. Conrad's Heart of Darkness, which had impressed itself powerfully on Eliot's imagination,[2] has precisely this structure. Eliot makes the point explicitly in a review from the same year, 1919:

> The maxim, return to the sources, is a good one. More intelligibly put it is that the great poet should know everything that has been accomplished in poetry (accomplished, not merely produced) since its beginnings - in order to know what he is doing himself. He should be aware of all the metamorphoses of poetry that illustrate the stratifications of history that cover savagery. For the artist is, in an impersonal sense, the most self-conscious of men; he is therefore the most and the least civilized and civilizable; he is the most competent to understand both the civilized and the primitive.[3]

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1 SE, p. 148. Eliot is able to approve of Jonson in terms of his other criterion of literary achievement, the creation of a coherent 'world', a point of view.

2 The Heart of Darkness provides the epigraph to 'The Hollow Men' and was originally intended to provide the epigraph to 'The Waste Land.' The influence of Frazer's The Golden Bough must also have been influential in establishing this connection between the depths of the self and the depths of the past, though Frazer himself would not have accepted such a conception, being firmly convinced of the priority of 'reason' in modern man. See John B. Vickery, The Literary Impact of 'The Golden Bough' (Princeton: University Press, 1973), Chapter 1.

3 'War Paint and Feathers', The Athenaeum, 4668 (17 October, 1919), p. 1036.

The double movement of Eliot's conception of art is here perfectly stated: the civilized differentiation of past into present and the discovery through the complex structures of the present of the uncivilized past. Neither is possible, however, without a total awareness of all that intervenes between these two conditions. The return to the sources is not an immediate leap from one point in time to its earliest beginnings, it is a progression through all that lies between them, a re-enacting of all the layers of civilization that cover savagery. The poet achieves this awareness in depth through his technical knowledge, which allows him to so structure his work that it will 'insinuate the whole history of a language and a civilization'.[1] In so doing it will reveal the depths of all human history. What Conrad's work describes through its narrative structure Eliot's poetry must achieve through its formal use of language, through its ability to recall from the hidden depths of the memory all the associations which the development of civilisation and the development of language have laid down there.

The ability to achieve this complex act of total awareness is, however, hedged around with the same preconditions, the same possibilities of a negative imposition of the social context upon the writer's consciousness, that I have been examining in the last section. Any break in the continuity of history will dislocate the passage of the mind towards the past that forms the ideal structure of History. Eliot's famous 'dissociation of sensibility', in precisely the same way that Yeats had formulated his idea of history, is a loss of continuity of association. Without a continuity of history the minds formed by history will not have the appropriate contents to

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1 'The Music of Poetry', OPAP, p. 33.

provide that associative connection between the present and the deepest recesses of the past, and, therefore, with the deepest recesses of their own selves. The forces which maintain appropriate forms of continuity, which provide minds capable of entertaining the whole history of the civilisation within their own associative potentialities, thus become a decisive precondition of art. Those forces can only be embodied in some authority, some system of governance, which will prevent the individual from breaking down the connections with the past in favour of the connections which he himself develops, in purely personal terms, in the present.

The shift in Eliot's attitude to Donne is closely tied to this conception. Eliot's early admiration for Donne was based on the latter's ability to create new and striking juxtapositions, innovative associations. By 1931, however, Eliot felt that Donne suffered from a 'manifest fissure between thought and sensibility, a chasm which in his poetry he bridged in his own way, which was not the way of medieval poetry.'[1] The dereliction of the 'way of medieval poetry' reveals a break in continuity, a loss of associative potential. That Eliot had initially laid the stress on the synchronic conception of association is revealed by his comments on Virginia Woolf:

> A good deal of the charm of Mrs. Woolf's shorter pieces consists in the immense disparity between the object and the train of feeling which it has set in motion. Mrs Woolf gives you the minutest datum, and leads on to explore, quite consciously, the sequence of images and feelings which float away from it..The book is one of the most curious and interesting examples of the process of dissociation which in that direction, it would seem, cannot be exceeded.[2]

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1 'Donne in our Time', in Theodore Spencer, ed. A Garland for John Donne (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1931), p. 8.

2 'London Letter', The Dial, 71 (August 1921), pp. 216-217.

This synchronic tracing of the 'images and feelings which float away' from the object is dissociative in that it breaks up our habitual patterns of associations; the ability to break out of the constrictions of our normal expectations is, however, destructive if it is imposed on us from without and disrupts the continuity of history. Dissociation in the perjorative sense is an enforced rupture with habitual patterns which prevents enough material coming into play in the associative process to allow one to reach the depths of experience. The synchronic process represents the innovative aspect of art, the diachronic its connections with the depths of the past through tradition. The former, which is Eliot's principal concern in the essays of 1917-1918, is irrelevant unless the latter is also operative, and in the declining stability of the cultural context after 1918 it is the latter to which Eliot gives most of his attention.

It is the paradox of Eliot's position that the contact with the 'swarms of inarticulate feelings' in the unconscious that is the end of poetry is something which, beyond the poetic context, we have to beware of. It is precisely the eruption of the hidden depths of the psyche, the primitive instincts of our uncivilized inner lives, into our ordinary lives that Eliot constantly fears:

> The awful daring of a monent's surrender
> Which an age of prudence can never retract.[1]

> Any man might do a girl in
> Any man has to, needs to, wants
> Once in a lifetime, do a girl in.[2]

Each individual contains the totality of the human past because for Eliot, as for Yeats, time is cumulative:

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1 'The Waste Land', CP; p. 78.

2 'Sweeney Agonistes', CP, p. 134.

> In order to know what a particular event is you must know the soul to which it occurs, and the soul exists only in the events which occur to it; so that the soul is, in fact, the whole past insofar as that past enters into the present, and it is the past as implied in the present. [1]

Like Yeats, however, Eliot does not see this process as automatic or, at least, does not see it as fulfilled insofar as it is automatic. The cumulative process of time has constantly to be reassessed by the active effort of the living: the passive sedimentation of experience in the psyche must be matched by the active acquisition of a perspective within which it becomes meaningful. Unconscious experience, in other words, must constantly be brought into the aura of the conscious. Thus, for instance, Eliot suggests, in relation to the decline of classical studies in modern education, that,

> the study of Greek is the study of our own mind. Our categories of thought are largely the outcome of Greek thought, our categories of emotion are largely the outcome of Greek literature. One of the advantages of the study of a more alien language, such as one of the more highly developed oriental languages, is to throw this fact into cold relief: a mind saturated with the traditions of Indian philosophy must always be very different from one saturated with the traditions of European philosophy - as is every European mind, even when untrained and unread. What analytic psychology attempts to do for the individual mind, the study of history - including language and literature, does for the collective mind. Neglect of Greek means for Europe a relapse into unconsciousness. [2]

Such a relapse into unconsciousness represents a historical retrogression. The Freudian terminology is a new acquisition by Eliot after his work on Bradley, but the Bradleian conception of the original mass of feeling from which consciousness emerges must have made the Freudian model seem almost familiar. [3] And for Eliot poetry comes more and more to represent

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1 K&E, p. 79.

2 'Commentary', Criterion, III, 11 (April, 1925), p. 341.

3 The previous issue of The Criterion to that in which Eliot discusses Greek and the unconscious had contained an article by Herbert Read on 'Psycho-Analysis', Criterion III, 10 (March 1925), p. 214.

a means of bringing what is unconscious into consciousness: if the study of history is the collective mind's equivalent of psychoanalysis, the experience of poetry is the individual mind's dream material from which analysis can proceed. The past emerges through the present experience of art to reveal the unconscious lineaments of our own minds. By making that past conscious we save ourselves from its destructive intrusion upon our conscious lives: art releases in an ordered form what otherwise must appear as a destruction of the order of our ordinary lives, but if art is used merely as a stimulus to personal emotion it releases disorder into the ordered development of art itself, undercutting its primary, therapeutic function.

The intrusion of the unconscious as a destructive force is evidently far from identical with the 'turning loose of emotion' or the 'accidents of personal emotion' of the early essays, but it plays a similar part in Eliot's evolving conception of the function and nature of art. In the terms of 'Tradition and the Individual Talent' we might say that only those who are in contact with their unconscious know what it is to want to escape from it. Art, at one and the same moment, reveals to us the contents of our unconscious and distances us from them: through art we maintain our contact with the deepest sources of our selves but, because we reach them through the intermediary of all 'the stratifications of history that cover savagery' we are not invaded by them. We experience them passively, but at the same moment we place them in a perspective, we accord them meaning, and so objectivity, and release ourselves from them. The associations which our memory holds allows us to reach back to those most basic aspects of ourselves, but because we reach them along that channel created by our awareness of a tradition they remain distant from our conscious mind: our conscious mind is not drowned by them.

In the polite world of letters it might seem to be making much of little to see the effects of unconsciousness as an imminent danger to civilisation, but for Eliot the emergence of unconsciousness into our conscious life is all around us. It is precisely this which is provoked by the breakdown in continuity between past and present. The intervention of personal emotion or of uncontrolled unconscious on the reading of literature is identical with the reliance on purely personal conceptions of morality in the public world. The latter is, it would seem, only possible when the sense of the present as a development out of the past and, consequently, the understanding of the present as a journey into the past, has been lost. It is this loss that lies behind Eliot's famous argument with Middleton Murry over the definitions and the evaluations of Classicism and Romanticism. In 'The Function of Criticism' Eliot sums up his sense of the argument:

> There is ... an alternative, which Mr Murry has expressed. 'The English writer, the English divine, the English statesman, inherit no rules from their forebears; they inherit only this: a sense that in the last resort they must depend upon the inner voice.' This statement does, I admit, cover certain cases; it throws a flood of light upon Mr Lloyd George. By why 'in the last resort?' Do they, then, avoid the dictates of the inner voice up to the last extremity? My belief is that those who possess this inner voice are ready enough to harken to it, and will hear no other. The inner voice, in fact, sounds remarkably like an old principle which has been formulated by an elder critic in the now familiar phrase of 'doing as one likes'. The possessors of the inner voice ride ten in a compartment to a football match at Swansea, listening to the inner voice, which breathes the eternal message of vanity, fear and lust.[1]

The eternal savagery at the heart of the individual is released as soon as one removes the bulwark of a sense of historical development, of tradition.

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1 'The Function of Criticism', SE, p. 27.

Poetry involves and maintains such a sense - if it is associationist poetry. Eliot believes that society cannot operate without such a sense; society cannot operate, therefore without poetry, because without poetry it subsides into unconsciousness. For Yeats the poet provides his society with those heroic models by whose associations individual acts and purposes can be judged; for Eliot the poet, less abrasive but no less important, brings to consciousness what is buried in the being of his society so that it will not be unconsciously dominated by it:

> We may say that the duty of a poet, as a poet, is only indirectly to his people: his direct duty is to his language, first to preserve, and second to extend and improve. In expressing what other people feel he is also changing the feeling by making it more conscious; he is making people more aware of what they feel already, and therefore teaching them something about themselves.[1]

The extension of consciousness is the extension of civilisation; giving up of consciousness is a reversion to savagery, but what it is one brings to consciousness is precisely what most belongs to the lowest levels of the psyche, that which belongs to the savage.

For Eliot, as, again, for Yeats, the prime contributor to the loss of consciousness is the depletion of the resources of language through journalism. In The Egoist of 1918 he described journalese as 'that flail of the Anglo-Saxon race, that infinite corruption of the Anglo-Saxon mind, that destined and ultimate cause of the downfall of the Anglo-Saxon empires',[2] and his disgust with journalistic perversions of the language rests on the fear that 'the race that cannot think clearly is doomed to fall before nations who can'.[3] Journalese breaks down the continuity of language and leaves

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1 'The Social Function of Poetry', OPAP, p. 20.

2 'Observations', Egoist, V, 5 (May 1918), p. 69. The piece is signed under Eliot's nom-de-guerre-litteraire T.S. Apteryx.

3 Ibid.

those who are influenced by it stranded within the banalities of the present or the eternal savagery of the past. Without the ability of any word to recall the whole process of the language's evolution in history, 'at any moment the relation of a modern Englishman to Shakespeare may be discovered to be that of a modern Greek to Aeschylus'.[1] A civilisation will have ended; one of the organic formations of history will have been subverted. And the importance of this is particularly crucial to a poet like Eliot precisely because the poem which he writes is an incomplete object: in order to fulfil itself it needs the healthy, civilised, mature mind of a reader who will complete what it offers, and such a reader is precisely what modern civilisation is denying the poet: 'the forces of deterioration are a large crawling mass, and the forces of development half a dozen men.'[2] The unconscious threatens a total eclipse of the work of art, of consciousness, of civilisation.

Just as the process of association (and therefore of dissociation) has a synchronic and a diachronic aspect, however, so too does Eliot's conception of the social location of the poem. The poem is denied its full existence if it enters into a consciousness which has lost its connection with the past, but equally it will lose its power of drawing upon the depths of feeling if it connects with a mind which has, synchronically, lost its connection with the totality of its own social environment. The poem which functions by a process of association necessarily depends on that which is beyond itself, on that which is beyond the apparent self of either the writer or the reader. Thus, as C.K. Stead has pointed out,

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1 Ibid.

2 Ibid.

Eliot describes certain kinds of poetic composition in terms of a 'dark embryo',[1] something that emerges into the light of day from the hidden depths of one's being:

> What one writes in this way may succeed in standing the examination of a more normal state of mind; it gives the impression ... of having undergone a long incubation, though we do not know until the shell breaks what kind of egg we have been sitting on.[2]

The nature of the egg does not merely depend, however, on the diachronic dimension, either in our own lives or in our society, but, equally, on an unconscious harboured in the social present. Eliot's model of society is continuous with his model of the poetic or the reading mind:

> Error creeps in again and again through our tendency to think of culture as a group culture exclusively, the culture of the 'cultured' classes and elites. We then proceed to think of the humbler part of society as having culture only in so far as it participates in this superior culture. To treat the 'uneducated' mass of the population as we might treat some innocent tribe of savages to whom we are impelled to deliver the true faith, is to encourage them to neglect or despise that culture which they should possess and from which the more conscious part of culture draws vitality; and to aim to make everyone share in the appreciation of the fruits of the more conscious part of culture is to cheapen what you give.[3]

The more 'conscious' part of culture drawing vitality from the lower orders makes of the latter a kind of unconscious, playing the 'id' to the elite culture's 'ego'. The unconscious of the lower culture is, in effect, essential to the consciousness of the higher culture: it is a synchronic hinterland from which the elements are drawn that will vitalise the creative process and complete the reading experience. The 'return to

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1 See C.K. Stead, The New Poetic: Yeats to Eliot (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1967), p. 137 ff.

2 UPUC, p. 144.

3 Notes towards the Definition of Culture, p. 106.

the sources' is not only possible by a delving into the depths of the past, it is made possible by the existence in the present of both a personal unconscious and a social unconscious: the health of the personal unconscious depends partly on the kind of experience which the individual has had and partly on the kind of matter he deliberately acquires through his reading: nothing can be done to make certain of what it will produce, we do not know what the egg contains, but we can at least attempt to fulfil the preconditions of health. The same is true of the social unconscious.

In some of his early writings Eliot suggested that this lower stratum of the corporate mind was, in fact, the healthiest. Writing of the death of Marie Lloyd he suggested that it was

> itself a significant moment in English history. I have called her the expressive figure of the lower classes. There is no such expressive figure for any other class. The middle classes have no such idol: the middle classes are morally corrupt. That is to say, their own life fails to find a Marie Lloyd to express it; nor have they any independent virtues which might give them as a conscious class any dignity. The middle classes, in England as elsewhere, under democracy, are morally dependent on the aristocracy, and the aristocracy are subordinated to the middle class, which is gradually absorbing and destroying them. The lower class still exists; but perhaps it will not exist for long. In the music hall comedians they find the expression and dignity of their own lives ...[1]

The terms of this discussion are significant: the lower classes remain a 'conscious class' because they have an art that 'expresses' their life. Thus what is dormant in their everyday experience is brought consciously into focus through the performance of the artist. Instead of being the unconscious of the higher culture the lower classes are here - perhaps because they have not been affected yet, in 1923, by the extension of the

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1 'Marie Lloyd', SE, p. 458.

franchise after the First War and their participation in democracy - a separate conscious entity. Eliot's use of popular idioms in 'The Waste Land' suggests the kind of relationship between various levels of culture that he outlines in Notes towards the Definition of Culture, but from the essay on Marie Lloyd it appears that he developed that conception more out of discovering it through his poetry than by working it out as an intellectual position. In the continuation of the same piece, however, Eliot foretells the end of this state of consciousness among the lower orders and, significantly, attributes it to the lack of audience participation engendered by the cinema:

> With the decay of the music-hall, with the encroachment of the cheap and rapid breeding cinema, the lower classes will tend to drop into the same state of protoplasm as the bourgeoisie. The working man who went to the music-hall and joined in the chorus and saw Marie Lloyd was himself performing part of the act; he was engaged in that necessary collaboration of the audience with the artist which is necessary in all art and most obviously in dramatic art. He will go to the cinema, where his mind is lulled by senseless music and continuous action too rapid for the brain to act upon, and will receive without giving, in that same listless apathy with which the middle and upper classes regard any entertainment of the nature of art.[1]

The breakdown of the audience's participatory role is the sign of a reversion to unconsciousness: it is, of course, the participatory role which is crucial to the associative mode of Eliot's own art, but it is a participation of which the poet is always ignorant. Was it the awareness of this void that turned both Yeats and Eliot to the drama, desperate for a sight of the faces, a hint of the minds, in which their own works had their ultimate being?

In the intensifying political atmosphere of the 1920s Eliot was,

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1 Ibid.

however, unable to find any significant continuation of this consciousness among the lower orders: the unconscious of high culture were lapsing into an unconsciousness of their own culture and, doubly benighted, like the football supporters in their railway compartment, were threatening to drown out the last lights of consciousness everywhere. The eternal underlying savagery comes knocking on the door of the present:

> Readers of an interesting German book, entitled Geist und Gesicht des Bolshevismus ... will remember a photograph of a proletarian conductor, with a couple of railway flags, directing some 'community singing' from the top of a factory. Of late, whenever any very large number of Britons is assembled in one place for holiday enjoyment, a Cup Final or Test Match, we find that a large part of the excitement consists in their singing all together. We have not witnessed such a sacrifice, and do not know whether it is as yet merely a newspaper wheeze, or whether it has really taken hold of the British Massenmensch. If it has really caught on we should like our social philosophers to tell us what it means ... We are already accustomed to seeing, from time to time, immense numbers of men and women voting all together, without using their reason and without enquiry; so perhaps we have no right to complain of the same masses singing all together, without much sense of tune or knowledge of music; we may presently see them praying and shouting hallelujahs all together, without much theology or knowledge of what they are praying about. We cannot explain it. But it should at present be suspect: it is very likely hostile to Art ...[1]

The sense of a cultural retrogression - 'we have not witnessed such a sacrifice' - and of a personal value system violated - 'so perhaps we have no right to complain' - are measured by the linguistic tweezers and rubber gloves which Eliot adopts for handling his subject, this piece of decaying civilisation. Instead of an art which raises their lives into consciousness, the masses are now indulging in participatory arts which are the herald of complete unconsciousness. In so doing they violate not only the diachronic development of their own culture, they deprive the high culture of its synchronic unconscious, without which none of its products can be successfully completed.

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1 'The Latest Muscovite Menace', Criterion, V, 2 (May 1927), pp. 285-286.

IV Closure

There is an ambiguity in our term 'unconscious': in terms of the Freudian model the unconscious is a substratum of the mind, parallel to our conscious existence; but unconsciousness also implies a loss of consciousness, to lose the awareness provided by consciousness itself. Metaphorically we can apply it in the latter sense to those who seem insufficiently aware of their own existence, and some of this ambiguity is evident in Eliot's conception. Those who have lapsed into unconsciousness of their own existence are those who are most prey to having their 'consciousnesses' invaded by the forces of the unconscious, by those concealed depths of the self whose most accessible aspect they have lost hold of.

Where such minds are the dominant minds of the age an associative art is not only impossible on terms acceptable to the poet, in that such minds are incapable of providing the appropriate memories for aesthetic experience, it is also potentially dangerous, providing the focus for eruptions of the unconscious which are capable of destroying the balance of the psyche altogether:

> But most people are only very little alive; and to awaken them to the spiritual is a very great responsibility: it is only when they are so wakened that they are capable of real Good, but at the same time they become first capable of Evil.[1]

As Eliot put it later, using a poetic technique which denied associative response:

> But let me tell you, that to approach the stranger
> Is to invite the unexpected, release a new force,
> Or let the genie out of the bottle.
> It is to start a train of events
> Beyond your control. [2]

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1 After Strange Gods, p. 60.

2 The Cocktail Party (London: Faber, 1950), p. 29.

The danger might not lie in a healthful transformation of the awareness one has of one's life, but in a desperate attempt to change the life of which one had been unaware:

> Doris: That's not life, that's no life
> Why I'd just as soon be dead.
>
> Sweeney: That's what life is. Just is.
>
> Doris: What is?
> What's that life is?
>
> Sweeney: Life is death.
> I knew a man once did a girl in -[1]

The life in death, death in life of which so much has been written in connection with Eliot's poetry is not only a concern of the content of Eliot's poems; it is a concern generated out of or homologous with their form. Life in death is a life lived without consciousness of self and consciousness of self depends on memory, memory both conscious and, in its Freudian sense, unconscious. That living memory is a precondition of the art's existence as well as the moral imperative which it seeks to impose on our lives. In order to fully experience the work we have to undergo the activity which the work urges us to, the uncovering of the hidden depths, the hidden connections of our unconscious - bringing them into consciousness. But that bringing to consciousness must always be an ordered, even if surprising or disturbing, experience: consciousness gives us control over our own lives:

> When I remember them
> They leave me alone: when I forget them
> Only for an instant of inattention
> They are roused again, the sleepless hunters
> That will not let me sleep.[2]

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1 'Sweeney Agonistes', CP, p. 133.

2 The Family Reunion, (London:Faber, 1963), p. 57.

In the context, however, of a loss of social control, of a balance between conscious and unconscious not only in the individual mind but in the whole social organism, the associative process can only be an invitation to chaos. A new order must be established in the social organism before the disorder of the depths can be plumbed; or rather, in order that they can be plumbed. It is Eliot's awareness of the danger of any untrammelled release of the unconscious that leads to his insistence on orthodoxy and tradition. They provide the bulwarks by which the deepest recesses of the mind's savage basis can be accepted without the destruction of consciousness. By providing continuity of experience they allow us an open channel to the depths; by insisting on order they keep them at a distance. They allow the unconscious, as far as possible, to enter into consciousness and be regarded there and they give the experience, the immediate experience, the benefit of a meaning generated by the point of view which they maintain. Their structure is society's form of externalising what Eliot had already described in Knowledge and Experience as the strange psychological capacity of the artists:

> The majority of feelings never succeed in invading our minds to such an extent as completely to fill it; they have from first to last some objectivity. I do not mean that they are any the less intense for this, or that they disappear under attention. A toothache, or a violent passion, is not necessarily diminished by our knowledge of its causes, its character, its importance or insignificance. To say that one part of the mind suffers and another part reflects upon the suffering is perhaps to talk in fictions. But we know that those highly organised beings who are able to objectify their passions, and as passive spectators to contemplate their joys and torments, are also those who suffer and enjoy most keenly.[1]

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1 K&E, p. 23.

By objectifying our 'joys and torments' the social authority of arthodoxy and tradition makes them more intense - because more conscious - and more bearable, because they do not fill our minds entirely. Not everyone can be one of 'those highly organised beings'; we achieve the same psychic state by proxy through art and through religion. We give up some of our personal freedom in order to become conscious individuals, no longer a prey to whatever it happens to be that is in our unconscious, what happens to be the pattern of our own associations.

The external boundaries of control set upon the processes of the unconscious is for Eliot a model of how society should be ordered, it is, equally, his model of the creative process. By the time even of 'The Function of Criticism' in 1923 the conception of that amalgamated creature, the artist-critic, has shifted significantly from the account given in 'The Perfect Critic'. In the latter the artist-critic is the man who has exhausted his creative impulses in creation and is, therefore, not fulfilling an unexpressed creative impulse in his criticism; in 'The Function of Criticism' the situation is reversed, and the artist-critic is a poet keeping his faculties in good working order for the critical part of his creative work:

> There is a tendency, and I think it is a whiggery tendency, to decry the critical toil of the artist, to propound the thesis that the great artist is an unconscious artist ... We are aware ... that the critical discrimination which comes so hardly to us has in more fortunate men flashed in the very heat of creation; and we do not assume that because works have been composed without apparent critical labour, no critical labour has been done. We do not know what previous labours have prepared, or what goes on, in the way of criticism, all the time in the minds of creators.[1]

Passivity and activity are again balanced in complementary functions: the

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1 SE, p. 30. Note Eliot's identification of a literary tendency with a political one.

passive process of creation with its unconscious bias, whether the analogy be that of the catalyst or the dark embryo, is matched with the active process of critical discrimination. What appears from the depths of the self appears in a context already prepared by tradition, and the critical labour of maintaining a tradition, and therefore prepared, if the psychoanalytic analogy is allowed, to control and to censor. Association, both as a creative and a critical process, has been laid under strict boundaries: there is not only the incubation in the 'vats of tradition and orthodoxy',[1] there is also, as After Strange Gods was to reveal, the test of dogma.

At the heart of Eliot's transition to a reactionary politics in the late 'twenties and through the 'thirties is his deep seated fear of the very processes of his own art. Only within the context of a rigid social system, setting its own authority on the individual, can communication between the artist and his audience be achieved, but, more importantly, only in such a context can the effects of such communication, such exploration of the depths, be contained and prevented from becoming destructive. That fear, I believe, led Eliot to turn away from an associative art. 'The Hollow Men' and 'Ash Wednesday' are associative poetry working towards an achievement of acceptable, traditional associations as more significant than whatever the unconscious happens to throw up. The method remains associational but, like Yeats's early use of occult symbols, the images strive to a denial of their own activity, a limitation on their own possibilities, through the assertion of a particular context to which alone they are relevant. Often the outcome

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1 Stead, The New Poetic, p. 137.

is the creation of a poetry not unlike Yeats's earliest associationist poetry, using similar symbols - the Rose for instance - which demands a specific context precisely by its complete lack of precision in itself:

> Rose of memory
> Rose of forgetfulness
> Exhausted and life-giving
> Worried reposeful
> The single Rose
> Is now the Garden [1]

It is poetry which shifts constantly between images which have a meaning by their specific context and images whose meaning lies in their associative potential in the reader's mind - 'Lady, three white leopards sat under a juniper tree'.[2] In a world which has lost authority the poetry becomes a poetry committed to the direct assertion of the values which must exist in society before an associational art can be relevant: the obscure disjunctive art of the associationist poem gives way to the hortatory declamations of 'The Rock'. In effect, the commitment to an authority destroys the art for which it was intended to provide a more secure basis.

Thus, in a sense, the poet's attempt to control the future reception of his art by supporting certain forms of social authority undermines the kind of art which he was attempting to support. This future concern is matched, however, by the same process in the past. Once one has uncovered the unconscious relations of the past they cannot remain as they were before one was conscious of them, and the crucial moment of Eliot's shifting awareness is revealed, I think, by a review of two anthropological works by W.J. Perry in The Criterion of 1924. The review poses questions which

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1 CP, p. 98

2 CP, p. 97.

reveal a new perspective superimposed on that of achieving the journey into the past that is made possible by associationist art. Perry suggests that the arts were a consequence of the search for magical objects and Eliot asks:

> At what point in civilisation does any conscious distinction between practical or magical utility and aesthetic beauty arise? ... And a further question we should be impelled to ask is this: Is it possible for art, the creation of beautiful objects, and of literature to persist indefinitely without its primitive purposes: is it possible for the aesthetic object to be a direct object of attention?[1]

The question poses itself as a demand for the purpose of an associationist art: when we have reached to the depths of the past what we rediscover is an image, a terminal conception, in which association is not the purpose of art. Having reached that point, are we committed also to the purposes of what it is we have uncovered? In Knowledge and Experience Eliot had denied the possibility of making any object a 'direct object of attention':

> ... what we denote has an existence as an object only because it is also not an object, for qua object it is merely the denoting, the projection of shadow of the intention; as real object it is not an object, but a whole of experiences which cluster round the point of denotation. (Not always, or even usually, a 'bundle of sensations'. All the associations and ideal relations are here meant.)[2]

What, however, his review on Perry's work really demands, do we do with the object if some of these clustered elements of our experience of it reveal to us an intention which goes beyond our own intention in seeking it. Association can only operate as long as we assume that all the associations uncovered are useful because they have been uncovered, but what if their usefulness demands that we accord them a higher status than merely a

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1 Criterion, II, 8 (July 1924), p. 490.

2 K&E, p. 137. What is contained within brackets is given as a footnote in Eliot's text.

quantitative addition to our experience of the initial object from which they have been derived? At that point art passes into purposes beyond itself, association reveals in the depths of the past purposes which undermine association as an end in itself: having discovered those purposes we discard the medium by which we achieved them in order better to fulfil them. The assertion of those purposes puts the associationist principle, with its involvement directly in present experience of the hinterlands of the unconscious, in parentheses: it is a mode, but not in itself a justification. It has to be discarded towards the achievement of higher possibilities:

> That was a way of putting it - not very satisfactory:
> A periphrastic study in a worn-out poetical fashion,
> Leaving one still with the intolerable wrestle
> With words and meanings. The poetry does not matter.[1]

The experience we undergo in the face of the open work, the direct stimulus of associations, reveal the true purpose of our activity: the openness leads necessarily to its own closure. He who has followed out to the full the implications of open ended associationist art is the most determined to close its possibilities for others; he has discovered the terrors of freedom.

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1 'East Coker', CP, p. 198.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE EARLY POEMS: CONTENT INTO FORM

In the following chapters I want to examine in some detail the ways in which the associationist theory of poetry manifests itself in the poetic productions of Yeats and Eliot. In this chapter I will trace the emergence of an associationist mode in Yeats's poetry; in the following its subsequent loss and its later transformation into a more profound understanding of the nature of associationist art and its relationship with the world around it.

1 'Songs of old earth's dreamy youth'

Yeats's earliest poetry was not written from an associationist standpoint. Despite the early appearance of associationist concepts in his critical writings he moved only hesitantly towards the achievement of a poetic form which would exploit the associationist workings of the mind. I want, however, to examine some of these early poems because they reveal a view of the world which was already in certain respects prepared for associationist art. Yeats's inheritance from the nineteenth century, his world weary Celtic twilight pose in the 'nineties, provided a structure of relationships - between phenomenal and noumenal realms, between past and present - which would accord with the underlying necessities of the associationist aesthetic.

In 1925 Yeats may have felt that there was little of his real self in his early poems and yet, given the importance of memory to his later aesthetic position, it would have been impossible for him to discard them. They are an essential part of the memory upon which the later poems feed, though Yeats apologises for them by transferring the remembrance to others:

> Every time I have reprinted them I have considered the leaving out of most, and then remembered an old school

> friend who has some of them by heart, for no better reason, as I think, than that they remind him of his youth.[1]

The poems stand up better, I think, than Yeats allows. They have, of course, been overshadowed by his later achievement, but they reveal not merely a late romantic penchant for vagueness, twilights and sorrowful lovers: behind the theatrical props there is evolving a real engagement with the central issues of aesthetic experience and of man's relationship with time and eternity. The latter division of experience, between our ordinary, illusory, everyday perception and the possibility of seeing into the real nature of the universe, was one that Yeats had learned from Blake and from Shelley, but his approach to it is not mere restatement of traditional themes.

In particular, Yeats's retention as the opening pair of poems in Collected Poems of the Blakean contraries, 'The Song of the Happy Shepherd'[2] and 'The Sad Shepherd'[3] is not merely a matter of sentiment. They act as a manifesto of the whole oeuvre. What they reveal is, at least in part, what I have been examining in relation to his prose writings - the importance of environment to the successful creation of art. The first lines of Collected Poems are

> The woods of Arcady are dead
> And over is their antique joy;

This is more than a mere dismissal of traditional Greek myths as the relevant means for poetic communication: it is an assertion of the loss of a suitable

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1 The Variorum Edition of the Poems of W.B. Yeats, ed. Peter Allt and Russell K. Alspach (New York: Macmillan, 1973), p. 841. Hereafter cited as V.

2 CP, p. 7; V, p. 64

3 CP, p. 9; V, p. 67.

poetic environment. Arcady is not being dismissed, it has been lost in a world, a historical environment, in which it is no longer believed that 'Words alone are certain good'. The world has accepted what Yeats describes as 'Grey Truth', but such acceptance is not progress, but a retreat into infancy: it is a 'painted toy'. The return to childishness results from the loss of historical perspective: without words there can be no retention of the past and without the past our consciousness remains that of 'sick children'. Yeats demonstrates his case through the image of the schoolboy reciting an ancient story:

> Where are now the warring kings?
> An idle word is now their glory,
> By the stammering schoolboy said,
> Reading some entangled story

The schoolboy, who is all of us, returned to the condition of children, represents not merely the juxtaposition of past glory with present inconsequence: the juxtaposition is justified by a causal connection. That the 'kings of the old time are dead' is not only a temporal truism, it is, in a deeper sense, a consequence of the world's wordlessness, its relegation of the word which preserves the past to the stammering schoolboy and its submission, therefore, to the 'cracked tune that Chronos sings', to its own place in the order of an impersonal time. The culture which consigns the past to the schoolroom can never escape the ambit of its own historical moment, can never create something which will transcend time, and fails, indeed, to understand the true nature of the universe, which is itself

> Only a sudden flaming word,
> In clanging space a moment heard,
> Troubling the endless reverie.

If the totality of the universe is in fact a 'word', then to ignore the word - as Eliot was often later to point out - is to lose contact with the real basis of one's own existence.

Words and dreams are set by Yeats in an integral relation in opposition to 'Grey Truth', but by a process which is typical of Yeats's thought throughout his life these psychological elements are mirrored in, or are a mirror image of, the ontological reality of the universe. Microcosm and macrocosm can be described by the same sets of terms. Thus the pre-phenomenal universe is described as a dream condition, an 'endless reverie', from which the world we experience emerges as the 'sudden flaming word'. The human microcosm, in order to relate itself fully to the macrocosm, must reverse the process and reaches contentment by re-entering the primal dream through words. The happiness thus achieved is not, despite the melodious phrasing, easily held. It has to face the recognition that just as the 'flaming word' has no referent, it <u>is</u> existence and speaks only its own being, so our being may be real only in the words by which we are remembered.

If that is the case, then the values of life are transformed. In the second section of the poem Yeats develops a series of opposing meanings out of the same group words. Here we have dreams which are destructive because bred out of action and not out of the macrocosm mirroring reverie. The irony Yeats develops is that these dreams are provided by the astronomer, studying the macrocosm but failing to have it mirror itself in his own being:

> Seek, then,
> No learning from the starry men,
> Who follow with the optic glass
> The whirling ways of stars that pass -
> Seek, then, for this is also sooth,
> No word of theirs - the cold star-bane
> Has cloven and rent their hearts in twain,
> And dead is all their human truth.

To study the universe in this way is to mistake the visible and passing macrocosm for its spiritual reality and therefore to destroy the potentialities of the heart that is the mirror of that spiritual reality. Such study can only breed 'New dreams', their novelty being a sign of their lack of truth,

and those dreams will not have the power to lead back to the heart of truth. Words and dreams will go unrelated in their experience because there will be no essential relation between inner and outer realities.

Such a relation is established, however, by the only significant action which the poem offers us, the injunction to

> Go gather by the humming sea
> Some twisted, echo-harbouring shell
> And to its lips thy story tell,
> And they thy comforters will be,
> Rewording in melodious guile
> Thy fretful words a little while ...

The shell, sea created and therefore partaking of a part of eternity, contains within itself the music of its source but will return to the speaker his own words transformed into an acceptable form, one in which being replaces meaning. The shell allows the achievement of that union of the personal with the universal which the first part of the poem had asserted to be true. The speaker's words are mingled with the multitudinous sound of eternity and return to him in a new and ameliorated form. The story told and the story returned are like the mirroring process of the individual psyche and the macrocosmic reality. The only relevant <u>action</u> in the ordinary world is the one that simulates the static nature of the eternal truth of man's relationship with the universe. The words cannot link the shepherd with the Word which is the universe, but at least they can comfort by suggesting the harmonious relationship between the human experience and that eternal reality.

The final section of the poem is the one that most lends itself to the interpretation which would present Yeats as an idle dreamer and the whole poem as an evasion of life, but the final section returns us to the thoughts of the first section in a now personalised form. At the beginning of the poem the dream and the word have been etiolated by the modern world,

though they are asserted to be essential to the very nature of the universe. Here, death allows a personal rediscovery of the life of the dream through words (now song) and so of a dream which mimics the universal reverie. Where in the first section all of life had been but a momentary word amidst a dream - 'the flaming word / In clanging space a moment heard' - death is now an eternal word within a dream, a word made eternal by recalling the past:

> And still I dream he treads the lawn,
> Walking ghostly in the dew,
> Pierced by my glad singing through,
> My songs of old earth's dreamy youth.

The song can only occur because of one of Yeats's frequent circumlocutions by which an action to <u>be</u> undertaken in the future is presented verbally as having already occurred: 'I must be gone.' Verbally suspended between present and future, the song allows the recapturing of a past in which the dream was manifest in life and in that past one can live fully - though to do so one must have passed into a future state of death: 'There is a grave / Where daffodil and lily wave'. The word surrounded by a dreaming death, which had been the whole universe of the first section, has here become, in personal terms, a death full of dreams: the mirroring relation of personal and universal is re-established. Future and past, the time of chronos, are resolved by their suspension into an eternal dream whose core is the word, and man is made again a harmonious part of the universe.

The structure of this poem hardly displays the stringency and succinctness of the later Yeats, but it is an interesting structure, building up a series of reflecting patterns which will be typical of many of Yeats's great poems. The harmonious tone of the poem is not in contradiction with its harsh view of a world running down, because a transcendental reintegration with a spiritual reality can be rediscovered through the poetic act itself. The

final two or three lines, weak as they are, are essential, because they return to the need for poetry in the present to offer personal salvation through its ability to recall the past and annul the banal world which we have come to inhabit. The act of singing allows us to rediscover a more significant form of existence, though only at the expense of life itself in our ordinary world. This is not a nugatory statement: the awareness which the poem shows of the destructive potentialities of art, and its willing acceptance of them, in some ways may be seen as a superior attitude to some of Yeats's later posturings. In fact, the retention of this poem as an introduction for the reader who opens the Collected Poems might well have been a warning from Yeats about the dangers - as well as the pleasures - of what the rest of the volume offers us, an art which finds its significance always in the past and therefore needs to annul the present, needs the death of the ordinary individual. Were we all to do as the final line urges, 'dream thou!', we might re-establish the earth's dreaming youth, though only at the cost of our own natural existence. The woods of Arcady are dead, perhaps, but they retain a semblance of existence in the effects of the isolated poetic act, which still seeks to transform the whole world into its own purity.

The complementary failure of 'The Sad Shepherd', on the other hand, lies in his failure to recognise the essential, mirroring correspondance with the universe demanded of the individual if he is to escape from his ordinary self; as the 'Song of the Happy Shepherd' has it, 'there is no truth / Saving in thine own heart'. The Sad Shepherd demands that nature recognise his separate existence, rather than attempting to achieve an integration with it. Thus he calls on each part of the natural world to comfort his sorrow, though they can do nothing but continue with the

expression of their own being. The Sad Shepherd is representative of the false poets of Romanticism for whom 'the stars, the streams, the leaves, the animals, are only masks behind which go on the sad soliliquies of a nineteenth century egoism'.[1] The shepherd attempts to coerce nature into acceptance of his own purposes and nature, and in a manner not altogether unlike Shelley's 'Mont Blanc' denies the Wordsworthian premise of its healing power.

Unlike the presentation of 'The Song of the Happy Shepherd', Yeats here uses the third person in order to divorce himself from his character and make clear the extent of the denial. Nature itself is always portrayed in the present tense - or in the compromised past tense of 'The sea swept on and cried her old cry still / Rolling ...' - as opposed to the action in the past of the shepherd: eternity denies itself to the passing world. Thus when he attempts to comfort himself with the sea shell, instead of being able 'to its lip [his] story tell',[2] linking it to that part of the body to which, as an orifice of eternity, it corresponds, he can only send his words' 'sadness through a hollow pearly heart' which is the image of his own. In other words, the relation of microcosm and macrocosm is inverted and instead of his achieving a spiritual unity, he imposes on nature the flawed awareness of his own heart. The shell gives back nothing because too much has been sought from it:

> But the sad dweller of the sea-ways lone
> Changed all he sang to inarticulate moan
> Among her wildering whirls, forgetting him.

The recovery of the past that is achieved by the happy shepherd is reversed,

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1 Frayne I, p. 103; 'The Poetry of Sir Samuel Ferguson - II' (Dublin University Review, November, 1886).

2 'The Song of the Happy Shepherd'.

and the sad shepherd is a man forgotten by the world. The sad shepherd fails to realise that nature holds no communion in his poetic universe because it is a part of the present from which he has to escape: it is a false universality, a present of eternal change and not an eternity unchanging.

Between them these poems establish the need for a reciprocal relation between the poem and the world which it inhabits in a double sense: in 'The Song of the Happy Shepherd' the poem is held to suffer from an antipathetic social world - there is no place for schoolboys and astronomers in 'The Sad Shepherd' - and the solution is a retreat into a personalised past; in 'The Sad Shepherd' the retreat into an isolated, solitary world proves to be a failure because it turns upon nature for an appropriate context. The poem must therefore depend for its success on achieving the kind of mirroring of the essential nature of universal reality that is asserted in 'The Song of the Happy Shepherd' and, at the same time, it depends for this achievement on the pure heart of the poet, a pure heart only made necessary because of the degradation of the world in which he lives. The retreat into pure self is made essential because of the lack of awareness of the past and of the importance of the word in the social world. The dilemma which these poems place before the poet and the reader, the dilemma of an uncaring social world and a hostile nature, is, however, in no way solved by them. The essential problem cannot be tackled because the words that are alone certain good, though they may imitate in our lower realm the potentialities of the all-embracing word, have to be created <u>in</u> the time (both as the historical present and as the ontological realm of temporal process) which they seek to deny. The death sought by the happy shepherd remains a future intention which the language

of the poem does not allow us to accept as real: the final section modulates from the forced wilfulness of 'I must be gone', through the passive hopefulness of 'And I would', to the present experience, 'And still I dream': the slide into reverie may allow the poet to reach a state which is an imitation of the ontological reality of the universe, but it is still a substitute for his original, saving desire for death. The poem ends as a negation of its own assertion as the death wish that represents the ultimate fulfilment of the poetic intention is transformed into a dream of a state of death; the illusion that that represents is made to do service for the death as dreaming that is craved. But in allowing this Yeats is not performing a poetic sleight of hand to deceive the reader or himself into the belief that he has achieved the eternity which the happy shepherd desires. The poem retains to the end its dramatic element - and it was, after all, initially part of the early play 'The Island of Statues' - and Yeats remains always outside of his creation. The retreat into dream as the nearest equivalent to the transformation of reality is perhaps not ironic, but it is no less dramatic than Prufrock's retreat into dream at the end of Eliot's poem.

The dramatic quality of its experience is revealed, I think, by the critical development of its ideas in the other poems in 'Crossways'. It is unfair to Yeats's early achievement to assume a simple and static conception of the world, a languorous and exotic scene and not to accord to his construction of the Collected Poems the same kind of rigour which we assume, and search for, in the later poems. The importance of 'dreaming' in the sense in which it is implied by the conclusion of this poem is one that was not to diminish in the course of Yeats's career - it was to be increased and deepened, and the process of deepening it was undertaken

from the outset in the rest of 'Crossways', which continues to examine the relationship between the dream and the eternal in the course of succeeding poems.

In 'The Indian to his Love', for instance, Yeats achieves an extremely complex verbal pattern within a poem whose simplicity is as much tactical and his prosaic tone in the later poems.[1] Again Yeats's concern is with the mirroring relationship of individual perfection with its environment, in the end with the totality of the universe. We are made aware of the island as the end point of a temporal process, but it is an end point that disavows the temporality which made - or rather, would make - it possible. For the island exists as a present reality only in the structure of the poem: its description is given by the first stanza, in the present tense, but the lovers' entry into this realm of perfection is predicated, as all their actions are, upon 'will', upon futurity. The stasis which the island's description invites us to accept as achieved by the lovers is, in fact, flawed by their arrival: from that point forward the whole poem is a single sentence dependent on a verbal nuance that attempts to integrate future action with the cessation of all action: 'Here we will moor our lonely ship'.

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1 'The Indian to his Love' - CP, p. 15; V, p. 77 - is also one of the first poems in Collected Poems to have benefited from Yeats's passion for rewriting, though it found its ultimate form fairly quickly. The poem as first published in The Wanderings of Oisin and Other Poems (London, 1889) was extensively revised for the Poems volume of 1895 and again for Poems, 1899. From that point onwards the additions and subtractions were directed towards tightening up the rhythm of the poem by removing, for instance, the duplication in a line such as this:

One with the glimmering tide, and wings, that glimmer and gleam
and dart.

and replacing it with a duplication on a less hesitant word:

One with the tide that gleams, the wings that gleam and dart.

I will be using for my discussion the version of 1899, which is much tighter than the original poem, but has not tired of its fin de siècle vocabulary.

The ambiguity of the lovers' situation, acting in time to end all action of time, is continued in the verbal structure of the rest of the poem, in which process and stasis are balanced against each other towards a suspension of the temporal realm, though in the end it cannot be ignored. Even when they have escaped, the lovers' murmuring will be of 'how far off are the unquiet lands', a locution which almost suggests desire. Dwight Eddins has written that the failure of this poem is a failure to make its utopia sufficiently positive and compares it, to its disadvantage, with Shelley's description of the island utopia in Epipsychidion:

> There is a crucial difference, however, between the respective dramatizations of this tranquility. Shelley's catalogue of cosmic disasters from which the island is protected actually transfers a sort of negative energy to the island's bliss. The reader is given a vivid sense of the hostile maelstrom which seethes outside the paradise, so that the paradise itself, by resisting this hostility, acquires a reverse animation of its own. No such transferral occurs in the casual dismissal by Yeats' persona of "all earth's feverish lands"; we are left unconvinced of utopia as a positive escape.[1]

But this is to ignore the essential inner contradiction of the utopia which Yeats is presenting, a contradiction which reveals the extent to which he does not believe in it as a utopia. Yeats is not doing the same thing as Shelley; we do not need the transferrence of positive energy to the utopia because Yeats is not presenting it as a positive. It is perhaps desirable, but only if one can ignore what the poet refuses to ignore - its inner contradictions. In the end there will still be death: the projection of a ghostly afterlife - which is hardly less real than the life that is desired - has to be seen as taking place within a poetic structure whose whole intention has been to deny that any such outcome is possible because

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1 Dwight Eddins, Yeats: The Nineteenth Century Matrix (Alabama: Univ. of Alabama Press, 1971), p. 26.

it has sought to deny temporality. The poem is forced, by its sense of realism to acknowledge that which it tacitly is trying to keep out - the processes of decay and termination involved in a life in time.

The balance between these antipathetic possibilities is achieved by syntactic constructions which undermine their own verbal activity:

> How we alone of mortals are
> Hid under quiet boughs apart
> While our love grows an Indian star,
> A meteor of the burning heart

The stress on 'are' in its rhymed position throws the weight of the sentence on to the lovers' existence, rather than their actions, and the use of 'hid' - they are not hiding themselves, but 'are hid' - emphasises state rather than process. The adjectival quality of the past participle makes their actions into qualifications of their being, which is static, rather than expressions of it in action. In the third and fourth lines of the above passage, the activity of 'grows' is countermanded by 'star', though the semantic and syntactic constancy of the noun is in turn qualified by its exotic but still worldly adjective, 'Indian'; 'meteor', on the other hand, with its implications of movement, has the stasis of the noun and the activity of 'burning' is reduced by its use as a qualification of 'heart'. It is in this suspended verbal universe that the human being can be

> One with the glimmering tide, and wings, that glimmer and gleam and dart,
> And great boughs, and the burnished dove

The island is a location in which a perfect unity with the environment is possible, though an image in the first verse perhaps points towards a different outcome;

> A parrot sways upon a tree,
> Raging at his own image in the dim enamelled sea.

The mirroring process is here complete and yet it produces, not contentment, but anger; it is the most powerful single image in the poem and it acts,

I would suggest, as a warning of the fact that all is not well with this edenic world: it contains potentialities which the speaker, who is only envisaging a possible future condition, wishes to ignore, but which the poet makes evident in the structure of the poem. The unchanging nature of the island exists only in the view of a human consciousness which views it from the outside; unlike the case of Shelley's utopia we never get inside it as it really is. The island is always trapped out of reach because it 'dreams under the dawn'; the activity of dream is predicated upon the island, which dreams its own existence and is not available for an actual intrusion by human beings because they have not been dreamed by it as a part of its perfection. The mind can encompass the existence of two antithetical worlds, but the attempt to move from one to another can only be achieved within the dream-like structure of a poem which signposts within itself the failure of what it describes.

In each of these three poems the same structural elements are present: each describes the existence of two antipathetic realms of being, the world of time and change, and the world of eternal stasis. These antipathetic realms cannot be united or even linked: they can only come together in any sense by some aspect of the one mirroring the other. Thus in the world of time the dream is a mirror image of the eternal nature of the universe: in both the material world is only an outward figuration of an inner process. To enter the dream may seem, to the experiencing consciousness, to be the equivalent of entering eternity, but once inside the dream one carries with one the temporal experience which one had sought to escape. It is only as a state which one has not fully achieved that the dream can be seen as perfection, because from the outside one sees its ability to mirror a transcendent possibility. To see Yeats's early poetry as <u>merely</u>

an evasive dream world is to ignore the awareness in the poems that the dream world is insufficient; its significance lies in its being less insufficient than the material reality with which we are surrounded and which we sometimes mistake for the eternal - as in 'The Sad Shepherd'. That which lasts through time is not the same as that which is eternal; the eternal is something we are always shut out from and can only construct simulacra of in dreaming poems. However, it is the words themselves which mirror the eternal nature of the universe, not the meanings of the words, so that the world we construct through them is always flawed by our recognition that those meanings belong to this world, the world of time, and not to the eternal.

The most intense expression of this division in the universe and of its effect of the individual psyche is presented in 'The Madness of King Goll'.[1] We are presented with the autumnal imagery as a sign of the decay which is integral with the world of time, but its use as a refrain, suggesting a constant state rather than a process, points us towards the other, eternal realm which is King Goll's despair:

> They will not hush, the leaves a-flutter round me, the beech
> leaves old.

Yeats again plays off the formal nature of his poem with its stated contents: the process of decay is suspended by the reiterated refrain. That impression is further reinforced by the verbal structure, since, employing the same resources as 'The Indian to his Love', the line is carefully balanced between activity and stasis: 'a-flutter' replaced in 1889 the original line, 'the leaves that round me flutter' which was used in the first

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1 See Eddins, Yeats: The Nineteenth Century Matrix, pp. 35-40 for a discussion of the Irish background to this poem.

publication of the poem in The Leisure Hour. The change removes the verbal force from 'flutter' and suggests that the leaves are set fluttering rather than that they move themselves. It also suggests an element of conspiracy, as though the leaves are always in motion wherever he goes, no matter whether they ought to be or not.

Goll stands between two worlds, trapped by his insight into the eternal, into the renunciation of his temporal role, but having to live out his existence in the temporal world which has ceased to have any significance for him. This moment of insight comes, significantly, at his moment of most intense action, a moment when the human world is suddenly seen mirroring the eternal:

> But slowly as I shouting slew
> And trampled in the bubbling mire,
> In my most secret spirit grew
> A whirling and a wandering fire:
> I stood: keen stars above me shone,
> Around me shone keen eyes of men:

The sudden realisation of a relationship between the world of temporal process and the world of eternity is destructive of the warrior instinct, of action, in Goll. The mirroring in the eyes of his men of the nature of the stars does not unite the two realms, it only reveals their momentary, mutual parallelism. At a moment of such intensity the temporal world can be like the eternal, but it is a similarity which, in the nature of things, cannot be maintained.[1] The man who experiences such sudden illumination is not admitted into eternity and stasis, but becomes an eternal wanderer in the temporal, which chides him constantly with its own insubstantiality.

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1 See p. 317, fn 1.

The fire which has been set burning within Goll is quenched by only one thing - a song:

> I sang how, when day's toil is done,
> Orchil shakes out her long dark hair
> That hides away the dying sun
> And sheds faint odours through the air:
> When my hand passed from wire to wire
> It quenched, with sound like falling dew,
> The whirling and the wandering fire:

The introduction of the Gaelic legend is an addition by Yeats in the 1895 Poems of what had originally been the arrival of various creatures to hear the song -

> And toads, and every outlawed thing
> With eyes of sadness came to hear (Variorum 85)

- but the purpose of the song remains the same, though stated more explicitly:

> My singing sang me fever free.

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1 (from p. 316). The mirroring of the temporal and the eternal which I have been discussing in relation to these poems is another of the aspects of Yeats's early poetry which probably owes much to the influence of Shelley's cosmic harmonies. Compare, for instance, the following examples of alienated and integrated relationships between the hero and the universe around him in Alastor:

> His wan eyes
> Gaze on the empty scene as vacantly
> As ocean's moon looks on the moon in heaven. (199-201)

> A little space of green expanse, the cove
> Is closed by meeting banks, whose yellow flowers
> For ever gaze on their own drooping eyes,
> Reflected in the crystal calm. (405-408)

> only ... when his regard
> Was raised by intense pensiveness, ... two eyes,
> Two starry eyes, hung in the gloom of thought. (488-490)

The significance of Yeats's indebtedness to Shelley has, of course, been studied by Bloom; see also George Bernstein, Yeats and Shelley (Chicago, 1970). The influence of Shelley perhaps extends much further than either of these suggest and informs the very structure of Yeats's image creation.

The addition of the legend, however, makes the content of the song not mere madness, but a macrocosmic version of what the song, as form, achieves for Goll. The legend describes the death of the day in which Goll is trapped, and the song momentarily allows him to pass into that other world which is the eternity of the gods. The song lost, Goll is committed to wandering the world of time to which he has not committed himself.

The significance I think of this revision is that it emphasises the extent to which Yeats was becoming concerned with the nature of form in his poems. Goll's song, as a formal construct, assuages the fever which he suffers from: the content of the song was, in the original version, irrelevant, but in the later version Yeats makes the content correspond to its effect as form. It is the formal construct which possesses healing power because it links, in another mirroring process, eternal with temporal. This is true, in a sense, of Yeats's poem itself for it is the first in the volume which has a specifically Irish subject matter and is based on a popular form. The poem is itself a momentary assuaging of the other half of the duality with which 'Crossways' deals, the duality considered in 'The Song of the Happy Shepherd', that between past and present. The ontological alienation which Goll experiences and which is overcome for a brief space by his song, is experienced, at the level of Yeats's own poem, as the alienation between past and present. 'The Madness of King Goll' transcends the barriers of time to reunite the modern Irish reader with a past from which he is as much shut out as is Goll from the transcendent. Just as the refrain of the poem encompasses both the eternal and the temporal by its repeated form and the song that Goll sings links the two discordant realms of his experience, so the whole poem links two discordant realms of the reader's experience - his degraded, truth grey world and the past of which he ought to be the inheritor. Macrocosm

and microcosm are mirrored in the totality of the poem as well as in its elements.

It is in this context that the ballad experiments of the early poetry are important. They represent a conscious attempt on Yeats's part to locate his poetry formally in the local community. They have received short shrift from most critics[1] but, like 'The Madness of King Goll', they enact as much as they say.[2] This is perhaps particularly true of what is generally considered the least effective, 'The Ballad of Moll Magee', which Eddins, for instance, considers illegitimate because it is in the form of dramatic monologue.[3] However, the ballad not only asserts, formally, Yeats's identification with a local community and its culture, it also asserts the effectiveness of the poetic process in reconciling antagonistic areas of the community. Moll Magee is another of those characters who has crossed over the boundaries of the ordinary world - this time into madness induced by suffering. The telling of her story

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1 See, for instance, Ellmann, The Man and the Masks, p. 142; Daniel Hoffman, Barbarous Knowledge (New York: Oxford University Press, 1967), chapter 2; Eddins, Nineteenth Century Matrix, pp. 60-62.

2 This is not to imply that their contents are not important: in fact, they continue the discussion of the divided world into new areas. 'The Stolen Child', for instance, presents directly the constancy of the other-world as it appears from our own. The land of faery, as much by the repetition of the refrain as anything, is presented as a place of security from this-worldly sorrows. The truth of this is undercut, however, by the rest of the poem: the faeries may belong to the olden time and have a place in eternity, but their world is flawed by inconsequentiality - 'To and fro we leap / And chase the frothy bubbles'. The lack of significance is emphasised by the rhyming of 'bubbles' with 'troubles'. It is only when the child, and, in sympathy, the reader, has crossed into their world that the mask of permanent happiness is lifted to reveal what has been lost, the warmth of our ordinary existence. Neither world offers a perfection which can outlast its actual experience.

3 Eddins, Nineteenth Century Matrix, p. 61.

in the first person is essential to the nature of the poem, because, as its formal opening suggests, Moll Magee is in the process of transforming her own past by art as she relates it to the children who mock her:

> Come round me, little childer;
> There, don't fling stones at me
> Because I mutter as I go;
> But pity Moll Magee.

The poetic form here establishes a symbiotic relationship with its own content: the transformation of the events of Moll Magee's life into a ballad which will be part of the common consciousness of the community is the effective vehicle for a change in the attitude to her of the children - and the children, of course, are those who might seem to bear her most malice because of the death of her own child. In the end, however, her story told, the object of scorn becomes the object of compassion:

> So now, ye little childer,
> Ye won't fling stones at me;
> But gather with your shinin' looks
> And pity Moll Magee.

The poem itself effects the resolution of antagonists as, formally, Yeats intended such poetry to resolve the disjunction between a traditional conception of poetry as part of the existence of a whole community and the modern conception of the coteries.

'The Ballad of Moll Magee' offers us a different conception of what the poem can achieve, as form, from that offered by 'The Song of the Happy Shepherd': the personal resolution of the latter is founded upon the syntactic possibilities of its medium, offering the dream of words as the only, even if qualified, way of integrating the individual with the universe; the resolution of the former is founded upon the fact that the <u>form</u> of the poem is a part of the common consciousness of a community, and that the alienated - mad woman or artist - can be reintegrated into the community

through the acceptance of those forms. The two poems are not, however, mutually exclusive. Both present us with situations in which the speaker is alienated by the past from the world of the present. The shepherd is alienated by an environment which no longer supports the essential pre-conditions of his art; Moll Magee is alienated by the death of the child whom she constantly mourns and the hope that her husband will return for her. The shepherd seeks a resolution which will not only give him back the mirroring relationship of the word with the 'word', he seeks, though has no hope of finding, an Arcady in which the community will be adequate to the recognition of such a possibility, a community 'on dreaming fed'. The shepherd is principally concerned with the ontological rather than the temporal division, but the two are aspects of the same problem; Moll Magee is primarily concerned with the temporal problem, but she too hopes for a resolution in ontological terms:

> And sometimes I am sure she knows
> When, openin' wide his door,
> God lights the stars, His candles,
> And looks upon the poor.

The poems turn their faces in different directions, both stylistically and philosophically, but the universe which surrounds them is the same. 'The Song of the Happy Shepherd' is a more accomplished achievement in itself, but it lacks the dimension which 'The Ballad of Moll Magee' most coherently employs of the other poems in 'Crossways', the sense of the poem as an <u>act</u> in itself. This discovery is, I think, crucial to the development of Yeats's poetry: it is no longer what a poem communicates which will centrally concern Yeats in the construction of his poems, it is what it enacts. This discovery is not a function of his associationist aesthetic - these poems nearly all predate any works by which we can judge Yeats's view on poetry - but it embodies one of the aspects of associationism and its

implications which Yeats will develop in his later work. These poems reveal an awareness that the poem acts in a community and the community in which Yeats must act is Ireland; the associationist psychology and its attendant aesthetic buttresses this view in psychological terms, for every poem is, in associationist terms, an act producing effects, not a communication transferring the contents of consciousness.

2 'Above the tide of hours'

Late in 1888 Yeats was admitted to the Esoteric Section of the Theosophical Society.[1] He had been involved in the study of the occult for several years[2] and was to define its role in his life, in a letter to John O'Leary, as being of the very centre: 'It holds to my work the same relation that the philosophy of Godwin held to the work of Shelley and I have always considered myself a voice of what I believe to be a greater renaissance - the revolt of the soul against the intellect - now beginning in the world.'[3] The role of magic and the occult has often presented difficulties for criticism of Yeats because they challenge so centrally what we all, tacitly, accept - the centrality of scientific rationality to our understanding of the universe. A very unvulgarised statement of

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1 See George Mills Harper, Yeats's Golden Dawn (London: Macmillan, 1974), p. 5. Harper's book documents in detail Yeats's relationship with occult societies and particularly his involvement in the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn, which he joined in 1890. Further information on the society can be obtained in Ellic Howe, The Magicians of the Golden Dawn (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1972). The effect of the occult on Yeats's poetry has been studied by Virginia Moore, The Unicorn: William Butler Yeats' Search for Reality (New York: Macmillan, 1954).

2 See Hone, W.B. Yeats (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1972), p. 47 ff.

3 Letters, p. 211.

the critical dilemma was made by the most scientific of our critics, I.A. Richards:

> Folklore and the Irish landscape ... and for a while an unusually simple and direct love poetry in which he became something more than a minor poet, these were his refuge. Later, after a drawn battle with the drama, he made a more violent repudiation, not merely of current civilization but of life itself, in favour of a supernatural world. But the world of the 'eternal moods', of supernatural essences and immortal beings is not, like Irish peasant stories and the Irish landscape, part of his natural and familiar experience. Now he turns to a world of symbolic phantasmagoria about which he is desperately uncertain.[1]

Such criticism, however, turns on definitions which would not have made sense to Yeats: one cannot say that the supernatural is a repudiation of 'life itself' if the supernatural is a recognised and existent part of one's universe. Richards' definition of 'life' is implicitly made in terms of 'our' common experience, thus allowing him to claim that it cannot be a part of Yeats's 'natural and familiar experience'. The assumption that these things are not a part of 'life itself' may be true for many of us, but our belief is no more than an unargued assumption in favour of rational explanation and cause and effect, assumptions which modern science has discarded.

Almost since their inception, however, our familiar beliefs have carried with them a shadow world of their own opposite, the world of rejected knowledge and belief which we call the occult:

> The word 'occult' means hidden, and in this sense lies the key to the occult's forbidding appearance; something may be hidden because of its immense value, or reverently concealed from the prying eyes of the profane. But this hidden thing may also have achieved its sequestered position

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1 I.A. Richards, from 'Some Contemporary Poets', Science and Poetry (London: Kegan Paul, 1926), p. 80. Included in W.H. Pritchard W.B. Yeats (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1972), p. 89.

> because the Powers that Be have found it wanting; either it is a threat and must be buried, or is simply useless, and so forgotten ... The occult is rejected knowledge: that is, an Underground whose basic unity is opposition to an Establishment of Powers that Are.[1]

The significance of the occult to Yeats is, at least in part, that it provides him with a context in which the poem is means rather than end. James Webb suggests the significance of the occult to art in mid-nineteenth century Paris in the following terms:

> The word Artist, with a capital letter, is the Alchemist's term for himself. It is significant that Baudelaire, for instance, uses alchemical imagery to express his passage through the flames of knowledge ... The self-regarding artist adds to the practice of his craft and idea of its sacramental quality, and the effect of this on his view of himself is profound. In the Middle Ages the Artist could paint to the glory of God; afterwards he came to paint, write or compose to someone else's glory. By the end of the nineteenth century that person was himself. Therefore the alchemical process has some relevance to the progress of the Artist as it came to be conceived. The function of both processes was to make oneself as God.[2]

The connection between the occult and art which Webb makes is in terms of end-directed action: both processes become means to a spiritual end, not means in the sense of an increase in knowledge or the transmission of information but in the sense of a chemical transformation. The poem, like the alchemical change, will not tell of experiences but will be the crucible in which experience is created, the ladder by which a higher state of being is achieved. In the preface to the 1899 edition of Poems

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1 James Webb, The Flight from Reason Vol I (London: Macdonald, 1971), p. 120. Webb analyses the relationship between celtic nationalism and the occult in Ireland and Scotland, see pp. 200-220. Webb also argues convincingly the relationship between the emergence of occult societies, and esoteric religions, and the dislocating effects of social change, see pp. xiii-xiv, thus adding weight to the arguments of the penultimate chapter of the present work.

2 Webb, The Flight from Reason, I, pp. 183-4.

Yeats informed the reader of the poet's structuring of the volume:

> He has printed the lyrics and ballads written about the same time as 'The Wanderings of Oisin' in a section called 'Crossways', for in these he tried many pathways; and those written about the same time as 'The Countess Cathleen' in a section called 'The Rose', for in them he found, as he believes, the only pathway from which he may hope to see beauty and wisdom with his own eyes.[1]

The image of the pathway is an interesting one because the pathway is one from which he hopes to see beauty and wisdom: the poems do not themselves embody such an achievement, though they evidently partake of beauty and wisdom if they are successful, they lead towards it, or rather through it. The pathway has no end point: it takes the reader through a certain countryside and that is its purpose. It is a means only towards a particular perspective on life, it is not the perspective itself.

The Rose is Yeats's symbol of the connection between the temporal world and the eternal that the linking of poetry with magic makes possible. Two divided ontological realms need not face each other, only able to achieve the occasional parallelism or mirroring, if there is some principle which controls the relationship between them. That principle is held by the magus, both artist and alchemist, but it is not a principle which the poetry can, at this stage, embody. Yeats's use of the discovery that the poem is only a means does not lead him to a symbolist poetry of the purest kind - the kind that offers symbols, or creates them and finds no more to do - it leads him instead to poems about the symbols and their possibilities. Bloom argues that the Rose in the poems of this period is a confused and confusing image:

> In 1895 the poems of The Rose were a solipsistic pathway

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1 Poems (1899), pp. vii-viii. Variorum, p. 846.

> to "the Eternal Rose of Beauty and Peace", but in 1925 the same Rose was a spirit that suffered with man, as opposed to the intellectual Beauty of Shelley or the Heavenly Beauty of Spenser. As the Rose was also Maud Gonne, Ireland (Dark Rosaleen), a central symbol of the Rosicrucian Order of the Golden Dawn, a sexual symbol, the sun, and much else, it is not a coherent image, and scarcely stimulates coherent discussion, whether in Yeats or most of his scholars.[1]

Bloom succinctly suggests the multitude of possibilities which inhere in the image of the Rose[2] but - at the risk of having already pulled the carpet from under my feet - I think the image is not as incoherent as Bloom suggests. Its multitudinousness is only a problem if one understands the rose to be a symbol on the same level as any other symbol in Yeats's symbolic universe. The earliest symbols are developed by Yeats in terms of direct correspondences between various aspects of life; autumn, for instance, will be identified with 'evening', 'manhood', 'water' and 'west'.[3] These specific connections will often only be felt in the poems as the vaguest of traditional associations, but the coherence of the associative process is not in question. It is not a coherent process. One will respond to the symbol with associations which are a function of the particular knowledge that one has: if one is au fait with the ritual of the Golden Dawn, that will be a relevant part of the response, if one is not the associations will take a form which is, in itself, no less valid. In fact, Yeats's use of the Golden Dawn symbolism seems to operate most

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1 Bloom, Yeats, p. 113.

2 See Variorum, notes on pp. 811, 842, 846.

3 Ellmann, Identity of Yeats, p. 26 quotes these examples as part of a list of such correspondances that Yeats kept in a journal relating to the Theosophical Society. Ellmann describes these correspondances as 'associations'.

of the time as a secret code within a traditional pattern of associations, rather than as a set of connections which can only be known by an informed group. The significance of the Rose, however, lies not in the fact that it conforms or fails to conform to one of these locuses of associational energy - it is itself a symbol of that energy. The Rose is Yeats's symbol for symbolism; it is a symbol raised to the power two, because what it symbolises are all those areas of human creativity where the symbol enables the passage of the mind into a realm of perfection which is antithetic to our ordinary existence. Its multifarious nature is not incoherence: it points us towards the multitude of ways in which Yeats, in the first flight of occult and mystic awareness, felt that the this-worldly and the other-worldly could be united.

The failure of the Rose symbolism - if it is a failure - is not that it can be associated with too much, but that it cannot properly act as an agent of associations at all. The mind is not drawn away from the image towards all the possibilities of connected images because the Rose does not exist on the same level as these images - it stands for them in their connections. The Rose symbolises that state of vision in which the eternal can be found connected with the temporal:

> Red rose, proud Rose, sad Rose of all my days!
> Come near me, while I sing the ancient ways:
> Cuchulain battling with the bitter tide;
> The Druid, grey, wood-nurtured, quiet eyed,
> Who cast round Fergus dreams, and ruin untold;
> And thine own sadness, whereof stars, grown old
> In dancing silver-sandalled on the sea,
> Sing in their high and lonely melody.

In this passage[1] the Rose is revealed as an image of the achievement of art at its highest, integrating it with a mystical awareness of the connection

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1 CP, 35; V, 100. 'To the Rose upon the Rood of Time'.

between the divided areas of the universe's existence. The connection, however, which the Rose symbolises can only be revealed by a constant shifting of contexts - 'The Rose of Peace', 'The Rose of Battle', 'The Secret Rose'. The level of symbolism on which the Rose exists means that it cannot effectively be written about as itself in a symbolic manner: that which stands for the whole class of symbolic connections cannot be a member of the class.

That Yeats was aware of the problem posed by such a high-level symbol is revealed by 'To the Rose upon the Rood of Time'[1]

> Come near, come near, come near - Ah, leave me still
> A little space for the rose-breath to fill!
> Lest I no more hear common things that crave ...
>
> But seek alone to hear the strange things said
> By God to the bright hearts of those long dead,
> And learn to chaunt a tongue men do not know.

Yeats's fear that he might cease to be a poet and become engaged entirely in his theosophical quest is one aspect of the danger that the Rose holds and the final line suggests that he fears also an abstruse symbolism which would be a foreign language to his audience. These are only aspects, however, of the central problem: the symbol is that which links the temporal world with the eternal and the rose itself symbolises that connection by being 'upon the Rood of Time', but if one achieves a vision of the 'symbol' in which all symbols are resolved, one has also resolved the division which makes the symbol necessary. To enter totally into the spiritual condition which the Rose symbolises would be to pass beyond the need for symbols: one would have become a part of the eternal itself. Thus the central 'symbol' of Yeats's earliest symbolic work in fact operates as a denial

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1 Ibid.

of the symbolism which it represents. If the symbolic poem is successful it translates the experiencing consciousness into a condition in which all symbolism is irrelevant, a condition of extra-temporal perfection. This is why the Rose poems are not, ultimately, symbolic poems: they are didactic explanations of the operation of symbolism through the use of an image which stands for all symbolic and mystic processes.[1]

The difficulty of these poems is that, for Yeats, symbolism in early 'nineties was the link between the artistic and the religious roads to perfection. Symbolism as an act in the present was therefore always heavy with religious connotation, but, more than this, the symbolism of art often became for Yeats the symbolising of the religious meaning of symbolism. Instead of being a symbol with two sides to it, the artistic symbol became the sign of a religious, mystic revelation, one which occurred outside the process of the poem itself. Symbolism in these poems ceases to be a technique of art: art is a description of the symbols which the poet finds in the world, and all symbols are merely pointers to the

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1 The problem appears in Yeats's work in a new form because of his attempts to make the poem an act in itself, but the problem itself was not new, compare Shelley's much maligned 'To a Skylark'. The final verse of that poem presents us with the same problem: the skylark's song offers such a sense of transcendent gladness that Shelley feels it outleaps the best of poetry:

> Teach me half the gladness
> That my brain must know,
> Such harmonious madness
> From my lips would flow
> The world should listen then - as I am
> listening now.

But what Shelley is listening to is something with no content, a denial of the language by which the poem presents the song. To enter into that condition would be a loss of all the possibilities of poetry by their fulfilment as a complete transcendence. Notice that the gladness is predicated on the assumption contained in 'must' and compare that with Yeats's syntactic technique, for instance, in 'The Indian to his Love'.

transcendent realm of the eternal; like the poems their contents are a matter of little concern. The symbol for Yeats, as it operates in the Rose poems, is something always travelling away from us: the poetic symbol represents a religious insight; the religious insight happens in some object in the world which is significant for its beauty; that beauty is not relevant in its own nature but only as a mode of directing us to what lies beyond it. Thus in 'The Rose of the World' the beauty of the individual woman is translated backwards into the beauty of Helen:

> For these red lips, with all their mournful pride,
> Mournful that no new wonder may betide,
> Troy passed away in one high funereal gleam,
> And Usna's children died.

It is then translated further back, or further up, into a principle that preceded the existence of the universe itself:

> Before you were, or any hearts to beat,
> Weary and kind one lingered by his seat;
> He made the world to be a grassy road
> Before her wandering feet.[1]

At the end of the poem we come back to the world, but not to the world as we left it at the beginning. The world of the first stanza is a world of change; the world as we find it at the end is a stable ontological realm, containing change but static in its essential form. The symbol has allowed us to penetrate a higher ontological realm and the perspective available from that realm allows us to see our own world as itself static in its essential nature - change. That nature, of course, is a terrible one if one doesn't happen to be a living symbol, since the world and its changes were only created to prevent 'eternal beauty' being bored with eternal existence.

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1 CP, p. 41. V, pp. 111-112.

As such, however, eternal beauty is identical with the eternal symbols of art. The significant formal element of the Rose poems is that they all, though based on the static perfection of the Rose, turn into narratives. 'To the Rose upon the Rood of Time' is a narrative of desire and refusal on the part of the poet; 'The Rose of the World' is a narrative of eternal beauty's passage into and through the world of time; 'The Rose of Peace'[1] is a speculative account of apocalypse and 'The Rose of Battle'[2] tells of the fate that awaits all for whom 'no love hath made / A woven silence'. The process of narrative, of change in the world, exists only as an adjunct to the perfection that does not change. Narrative in all these poems is only necessary because the essence that they point towards cannot be put into a poem: it is contained in the implications and the image presented by one word - Rose. Unless one were merely to incant that word endlessly one needs the variety of change, but the narrative structure is always a mere subsidiary to the essence the poems seek. Nonetheless, though, the poems enact the world of change which their symbolic titles deny: they can only enact it, however, as narrative, they cannot enact it as the train of associations provoked by the poem's symbols because the poems are about symbolism and its outcome, not the utilisation of symbolism towards any self-discovery on the poet's or the reader's part.

The relationship between symbol and narrative is revealed in Yeats's 1898 essay 'A Symbolic Artist'. Here Yeats's specifically eschews the associationist impulse in his conception of the symbol: 'If one imagine a flame burning in the air, and try to make one's mind dwell on it, that

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1 CP, pp. 41-42. V, pp. 112-113.

2 CP, p. 42. V, p. 113.

it may continue to burn, one's mind always strays immediately to other images; but perhaps, if one believed that it was a divine flame, one's mind would not stray.'[1] The flame from which one would not have to stray into its associations - which Yeats described in 'William Blake and his Illustrations to the Divine Comedy' as 'the rotten rags of memory'[2] - is the same as the image of the Rose: each is single, self-contained and, when one believes them a part of the divine, sufficient in themselves. As soon as Yeats moves towards describing, however, an example of the symbolic art he is dealing with it becomes part of a narrative pattern:

> The Knight upon the Grave of his Lady tells much of its meaning to the first glance; but when one has studied for a time, one discovers that there is a heart in the bulb of every hyacinth, to personify the awakening of the soul and of love out of the grave. It is now winter, and beyond the knight, who lies in the abandonment of his sorrow, the trees spread their leafless boughs against a grey winter sky; but spring will come, and the boughs will be covered with leaves, and the hyacinths will cover the ground with their blossoms ...[3]

The symbolic structure of this picture is transformed in Yeats's analysis of it into a narrative: the present object, which according to symbolist lore should only be concerned with 'pattern and rhythm', in fact turns out to be full of what Yeats says no longer interests him - 'subject pictures':

> Pattern and rhythm are the road to open symbolism, and the arts have already become full of pattern and rhythm. Subject pictures no longer interest us, while pictures with patterns and rhythms of colour, like Mr Whistler's, and drawings with patterns and rhythms of line, like Mr. Beardsley's in his middle period, interest us extremely.[4]

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1 'A Symbolic Artist and the Coming of Symbolic Art', Frayne II, p. 134.

2 E&I, p. 118.

3 Frayne II, p. 136. Had Eliot read this essay - is it a source for the hyacinths of 'The Waste Land'? See the discussion of the hyacinth image in my 'Introduction'.

4 Ibid., p. 134.

The problem with Althea Gyles's picture is the same as the problem with Yeats's Rose poems: it takes as its subject matter what ought to be its form. It is a poem depicting allegorically the nature of the symbolic relationship between man and the eternal rather than symbolically embodying it.

When I speak here of the 'problem' of the Yeats poems I do not mean that it is a problem in our understanding of them or that it is a problem about whether or not they are good poems. The problem is the problem they carry in their own existence and of which Yeats is fully aware. The problem is dramatised for us by the two poems which Yeats places among the Rose poems. These - 'Fergus and the Druid'[1] and 'Cuchulain's Fight with the Sea'[2] - have as their locus the world of the ancient myths. The myths as form are portions of the eternal, but they are the antithesis of the modern in being devoted to action rather than contemplation. The narrative which each of these poems contains, however, dramatises the conflict between the world of action and the world of eternity, thus dramatising the conflict between their own form and their content. They turn the conflict of the Rose poems inside out, but the terms of the conflict are the same. One is concerned with the static eternal in the present and turns into narrative in trying to deal with it; these poems deal with the active, eventful world of the eternal myths, but present that world of action failing in its conflict with time. In 'Fergus and the Druid' Fergus asks for the Druid's 'dreaming wisdom' in order to escape from the responsibilities that his kingship has imposed on him:

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1 CP, p. 36, V, p. 102.

2 CP, p. 37, V, p. 105.

Druid. What would you, Fergus?

Fergus. Be no more a king
But learn the dreaming wisdom that is yours.

The terrible thing about Fergus's responsibilities is that they are undertaken in the knowledge that they achieve nothing for the man, but 'waste his blood to be another's dream'. Fergus realises, in other words, that his actions will make his name eternal without making him eternal. He realises what is, in fact, one of the possible truths about the poem in which he appears: the poem has retained the name of Fergus as part of the eternity of myth, but has no power to save the man it celebrates. The fulfilment of Fergus's wish, however, leads only to an awareness of another kind of eternity, the eternity of his soul's journey, which makes all life seem empty:

> I see my life go drifting like a river
> From change to change; I have been many things -
> A green drop in the surge, a gleam of light
> Upon a sword, a fir-tree on a hill,
> An old slave grinding at a heavy quern,
> A king sitting upon a chair of gold,
> And all these things were wonderful and great;
> But now I have nothing, being all.

Eternity of this kind, an eternity not of form but of life, is a weary weight to drag through the world: knowledge is destructive. The eternity of the myth is fulfilling only if one is not living inside its ontological world; value can only be experienced, as in 'The Rose of the World', in the realm of time and change. The eternity which Fergus represents for us, and by which we are offered something of value to our own lives, cannot be given to him without its depriving his life entirely of values. In eternity everything is equal, nothing significant, as Fergus learns after the Druid opens for him his bag of dreams:

> Ah! Druid, Druid, how great webs of sorrow
> Lay hidden in the small slate coloured thing!

What appears to be innocuous in this world turns out to be destructive when what it contains belongs to the other world: an image, perhaps, of the danger of art itself.

The alternative pattern is presented in 'Cuchulain's Fight with the Sea'. The mythic hero defeats time in this case in action, by killing his own son. The process of nature by which son should replace father has been denied, but by killing his son Cuchulain has cut himself off in time. The enchantment which leads him to fight the sea is the fulfilment of his actions: having defied nature he has nothing left to him but to defy what is most like himself:

> Quinet has traced the influence of the desert on the Israelitish people. As they were the children of the earth, and as the Parses are of the fire, so do the Celtic Irish seem of the fellowship of the sea: ever changing, ever the same.[1]

In the original version of the poem, Yeats presents us with Cuhoollin's death as the end point of the poem, but in revisions he altered not only the title of the poem from 'The death of Cuhoolin', but the significance of the ending. The original, as it appeared in Poems (1895) and as it remained until the revised eidtion of 1924 was as follows:

> In three days' time, Cuhoollin with a moan
> Stood up, and came to the long sands alone:
> For four days warred he with the bitter tide;
> And the waves flowed over him, and he died.

Cuhoollin's death here, however, takes no account of the fact that he lives, in the only way - as Yeats recognised[2] - that he might ever have lived, inside the eternal structure of the myth. The revision of 1924 makes the

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1 Frayne I, p. 166.

2 'Indeed Cuchullin, Finn, Oisin, St. Patrick, the whole ancient world of Erin may well have been sung out of the void by the harps of the great bardic order.' (Frayne I, p. 164).

conflict between the content of the poem as a narrative and its use of materials out of myth much sharper:

> Cuchulain stirred,
> Stared on the horses of the sea, and heard
> The cars of battle and his own name cried;
> And fought with the invulnerable tide.

The tide here is 'invulnerable', but so too is the image of Cuchulain which the myth preserves. That image is what the poem moves towards and what is left in the reader's mind, left endlessly reverberating with significance because essentially unfinished. It is a conception of eternity which is, however, complicit with time and not in opposition to it and which Yeats probably did not become fully aware of until at least 1906, its being perhaps one of the 'Discoveries' of that year: 'If it be true that God is a circle whose centre is everywhere, the saint goes to the centre, the poet and artist to the ring where everything comes round again.'[1]

It is time as a realm of complete opposition to eternity that dominates 'The Rose' and 'The Wind Among the Reeds', probably the best volume Yeats produced until 'The Wild Swans at Coole'. The two ontological realms are, in the poems of this period, mutually contradictory. Neither is capable of satisfying the spiritual desires of the soul, which, according to the pan-psychism which lies behind Yeats's thought at this time, is eternal but can only manifest itself in the world of the temporal. Trapped into the single form given it by time, however, it always seeks a transcendence into the higher realm from which it has been shut out, shut out not in terms of existence - the soul is eternal - but in terms of awareness.

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1 'Discoveries', E&I, p. 287.

3 'The books of my numberless dreams'

In many of the poems of this period time is invoked as an absolute abstraction:

> Where Time would surely forget us, and Sorrow come near us
> no more. [CP 47]

> That Time can never mar a lover's vows
> Under that woven changeless roof of boughs. [CP 49]

It is such abstractions which Pound no doubt objected to in Yeats's poetry and yet they are essential to the nature of his view of the world at this stage in his development. Time is not invoked in terms of change, but as the total realm of change which is itself unchanging in its relationship with other realms of existence. It is in this external aspect that Yeats primarily wishes to deal with time and so the abstraction is essential. The modernist penchant for the 'concrete' denies the validity of this kind of poetry, but cannot deny the value of the poems as poems of their kind. It is in 'The Wind Among the Reeds' that the balance between these antagonistic realms is most fully established and the implications of that balance most fully worked out. It has been suggested by Thomas Parkinson[1] that in this volume, 'the poetic language is the language only of the anima mundi - the potential conflict between time and eternity, personal and impersonal which was the overt theme of earlier poems ... cannot be explored.' The abstract view of time which characterises the poems of 'The Rose' is, however, continued into 'The Wind Among the Reeds':

> Time drops in decay,
> Like a candle burnt out. [CP 62]

> And time and the world are ever in flight [CP66]

> And pluck till time and times are done [CP 67]

> And Time and Birth and Change are hurrying by [CP 68]

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1 Thomas Parkinson, W.B. Yeats Self Critic (Berkeley: Univ. of California, 1951), p. 49.

Time in this sense is itself eternal: the whole realm is as eternal as that which, from within the temporal realm, we regard as eternal and beyond the world of our own existence. The two realms thus come close together and may be seen as inverted versions of one another. We no longer need a 'symbol' to pass from one into the other: in the structure of the poems we pass between them constantly because we can pass into the myths which are, as it were, the body of the eternal in our perception of it. The artist who returns to the ancient myths returns to the creatures apprehended by men who 'looked on naked eternity'[1] and gives up the burden imposed by knowledge of the external world in favour of 'filling our thoughts with the essences of things, and not with things'.[2]

The eternity embodied in the myths remains, however, like the eternity offered by the Rose, a dangerous thing. The danger is revealed in the opening poem, 'The Hosting of the Sidhe',[3] because the Sidhe in their progress through the world calling on human beings to leave their ordinary existence behind may offer an eternal existence, but it is one that is aimless. The poem's locus is the eternal, but all its action is pointless except in being directed towards the temporal:

> Away, come away:
> Empty your heart of its mortal dream

In one of the earliest of his climactic rhetorical questions Yeats asks:

> The host is rushing twixt night and day
> And where is there hope or deed as fair?

The question can hardly be read without an implicit doubt as to the value of what it demands. But that doubt must, equally, be a doubt about the

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1 Frayne I, p. 297: 'The Ainu', (Speaker, October 7, 1893).

2 E&I, p. 193: 'The Autumn of the Body'.

3 CP, p. 61. V, p. 140.

kind of poetry that Yeats describes in 'The Autumn of the Body':

> The arts are, I believe, about to take upon their shoulders the burdens that have fallen from the shoulders of the priests ... We are about to substitute once more the distillation of alchemy for the analyses of chemistry and for some other sciences; and certain of us are looking for the perfect alembic that no silver or golden drop may escape.[1]

The desire for the end of time must be a desire for the end of art, since if art is successful it will translate us into a new perfection. The end of art must be the end too of the eternity which it attempts to embody, because we ourselves will have become that perfection - we will no longer need it in our art. The paradox is contained in the second poem of the volume, 'The Everlasting Voices'.[2] The real desire of the speaker living in time, is not only for an apocalypse which will mean that time will 'be no more', but an apocalypse which will silence the everlasting voices:

> O sweet everlasting Voices be still.

The voices, of course, are integral with the passing world - 'you call in birds, in wind on the hill, / In shaken boughs, in tide on the shore'. - and so is art: to demand the end of time is to demand the end of the everlasting as well, leaving only what was before the whole universe was made up. The first poem presents us with eternity spatially present in our world; the second with eternity revealing itself eternally in time, and neither is to be trusted and accepted by man. The resolution they offer is insufficient, being a part, themselves, of what must be resolved.

We can see the problem at work in two of the most powerful poems of the volume: 'He mourns for the change that has come upon him and his

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1 E&I, p. 193.

2 CP, p. 61. V, p. 141.

beloved'[1] and 'He bids his beloved be at peace'.[2] In the first there are two distinct ways in which we can read the poem: Yeats gives us a long note indicating the ancestry of the symbols that appear in the first lines:

> Do you not hear me calling, white deer with no horns!
> I have been changed to a hound with one red ear ...

Yeats explains,

> My deer and hound are properly related to the deer and hound that flicker in and out of the various tellings of the Arthurian legends, leading different knights upon adventures, and to the hounds and to the hornless deer at the beginning of, I think, all tellings of Oisin's journey to the country of the young. The hound is certainly related to the Hounds of Annwoyn or of Hades, who are white, and have red ears ...[3]

And much more of the same. What Yeats is doing in this note is denying the associational response in the reader: he is defining for us the context in which we should respond to his 'symbols' by, as usual, turning them into narrative and allegorising them. The limitation which this involves is all the more clear when one considers that only shortly afterwards, in his essay on 'The Philosophy of Shelley's Poetry' (1900), he uses the same cluster of images to explain his reaction to one of Shelley's symbols:

> Because the wolf is but a more violent symbol of longing and desire than the hound, his wolf and deer remind me of the hound and deer that Oisin saw in the Gaelic poem chasing one another on the water before he saw the young man following the woman with the golden apple; and of a Galway tale that tells how Niamh, whose name means brightness of beauty, came to Oisin as a deer; ...[4]

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1 CP, p. 68. V, p. 153.

2 CP, p. 69; V, p. 154.

3 V, p. 806

4 'The Philosophy of Shelley's Poetry', E&I, p. 90.

Yeats's memory here is personal; what he brings to Shelley's image is something culled from his own reading and his own imagination and it leads him further and further away from Shelley's original image in true associationist fashion. With his own poem, however, Yeats is defining the relations for us; that he felt the need to do so reveals the extent to which he had not yet understood the implications of his own developing position.

Thus on one level we can read 'He mourns for the change' as a series of symbols for the lover's own experiences: the eternal forms of the myth allow the writer to express the lover's feelings in a form which reveals the fact that 'every emotion is, in its hidden essence, an unfallen angel of God, a being of incorruptible flame'.[1] Every human emotion is a part of eternity and thus can only be properly embodied in literature by using images which are also, by their long lasting relationship with human consciousness, a part of eternity. The form adopted is essential as a revelation of the true nature of the experience. The problem, however, is that the experience loses itself in the myth; the specific experience disappears, leaving only something that accommodates itself to the mythic world through which it is expressed. The emotion is resolved into its essence, but it is an essence which the reader cannot reach by himself - he is directed towards it by Yeats's notes. The poem can be neither, therefore, a revelation of the poet's own feeling - the symbolism is, in effect, there to hide such personal elements - nor a path for the reader to discover his own feelings: read thus the poem is trapped within its own tecnhique.

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1 Frayne I, p. 374. 'That Subtle Shade' (Bookman, August, 1895): this is a review of Arthur Symons's London Nights, and is from the same year as the essay 'The Moods'.

If we read it, however, as a poem which, like others of this volume, has its location within the world of the eternal in order to examine the nature of the eternity towards which symbolic poetry directs us, the poem then becomes dramatic, because it is spoken by a man who has actually been translated from one level of existence on to another. In this eternal world, however, the configurations of the ordinary world repeat themselves - forever. The desire for the eternal which so many of the other poems express is here fulfilled, only to lead to a further desire - the desire for an apocalypse which will resolve all the divisions of the world forever:

> And Time and Birth and Change are hurrying by.
> I would that the boar without bristles had come from the West
> And had rooted the sun and the stars out of the sky
> And lay in the darkness, grunting, and turning to his rest.

This has, rightly, been seen as prefiguring the moment of 'The Second Coming',[1] but it is a different kind of image from the later one. Here we are certainly left with a powerful visual image which resonates beyond the poem; but the associations which we create, or which arise in us, as a result of this image contradict the nature of what is being said. The boar ends the world as it ends the poem, but only the poem as it is printed on the page, not the poem as it exists in the mind of the reader. There the image carries on, creating disturbing eddies after the actual reading of the poem is completed - as, indeed, it ought to according to the associationist scheme. In the later poem, however, the mind's groping towards an understanding of the given image,

> And what rough beast, its hour come round at last,
> Slouches towards Bethlehem to be born? [2]

is itself an imitation of the process which is being described: the apocalyptic moment is not a final one, it is a redirecting of all the energies of the world and the effort to comprehend the image is the effort

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1 See Bloom, Yeats, p. 127 for instance.

2 CP, p. 210. V, p. 401.

to comprehend the new world that is emerging from the carcass of the old. The power of the later image comes partly from the intrusion into ordinary life of something from another realm of existence; in 'He mourns for the change' we have already been translated on to that mythic plane and so the apocalyptic image does not come upon us with such terrifying force. Of course, that is partly because it does not need to do so: it is an image of relief from the contradictions of life in eternity as well as of life in time.

The same process, but from the alternative perspective, can be seen at work in the following poem, 'He bids his beloved be at peace'.[1] We know that this poem was written by Yeats during his relationship with Olivia Shakespear [2] and the statement which it contains probably reflects the doubts that Yeats entertained about the possibility of sustaining the relationship. The technique of the poem, however, transforms the statement of impending disaster into a statement about the ontological condition of the temporal world. The speaker cries -

> O vanity of Sleep, Hope, Dream, endless Desire,
> The Horses of Disaster plunge in the heavy clay.

- and the sense of 'Disaster' implies a change from one condition to another, as though Yeats feels they are sliding downward to some crisis not very distantly in the future. The poem's symbolic technique changes the connotations of disaster, however, into a permanent condition of temporal existence. The horses may image the impending crisis, but in the context of the rest of the poem's imagery,

> The North unfolds above them clinging, creeping night,
> The East her hidden joy before the morning break,
> The West weeps in pale dew and sighs passing away

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1 CP, p. 69. V, p. 54.

2 see Memoirs, p. 86.

the Horses cease to be an eternal image, and become an image of eternity. This is underlined by the use of the static verbal locutions we have seen in previous Yeats poems: 'their long manes a-shake', for instance, and the universalising of 'plunge in the heavy clay', with its implication of all mortality being pounded beneath the 'hoofs heavy with tumult'. In this poem, as in the previous one, the apocalyptic power of the vision - and both are great achievements in this respect - is at odds with emotional context we sense behind the poem. The technique does not allow us to make the poem specific either by seeing a one to one relation with the poet's own emotional state or by following its images in their effects upon our own consciousness: what the technique does allow Yeats to do, is to dramatise the conflict between the separated ontological realms which his poems inhabit. The symbolism no longer, in terms of the content which the poems present, unites these two realms, it is the medium through which their antagonism, and a desire for their total abolition, can be expressed. Formally, by their use of Irish material, the poems of course still enact the need for a poetry which will reunite the modern race with the deepest possibilities and ultimate images of its own consciousness and, equally, the poems assert the importance of the symbolic correspondences to the unity of the universe; but the content of both poems challenges the resolution which the symbolic technique is supposed to make possible. Where the Rose poems had offered a still point through which one could penetrate into the eternal, the stillness in these poems is in the destructive relationship of the eternal to time, and of time to eternity.

The resolving perfection represented by the Rose is now no longer available almost at will as it seemed to be in 'The Rose' volume. It is

now 'The Secret Rose',[1] a secret held not by the initiates of the occult order, but something that holds itself in secret from the world. The marvellous closing passage of this poem reveals the extent to which the Rose has ceased to symbolise experiences of beauty easily obtainable in the world and offering, each of them, the potentiality of transcendence:

> I, too, await
> The hour of thy great wind of love and hate.
> When shall the stars be blown about the sky,
> Like the sparks blown out of a smithy, and die?

This Rose of the apocalypse gains its power in Yeats's poem because of the tension created between the 'I', who waits, and the overwhelming experience desired, because what is desired at the end of the poem in fact contradicts the earlier parts of the poem. There, where we are given examples of those who have been enfolded by the Rose, the emphasis is all on effort in time:

> And the proud dreaming king who flung the crown
> And sorrow away, and calling bard and clown
> Dwelt among the wine-stained wanderers in deep woods;
> And him who sold tillage, and house, and goods,
> And sought through lands and islands numberless years,
> Until he found with laughter and with tears,
> A woman, of so shining loveliness,
> That men threshed corn at midnight by a tress,
> A little stolen tress.

These various efforts were not directed towards achieving any mystical awareness, but succeeded. The speaker's position, however, like that of Fergus in 'Fergus and the Druid', is one of knowing what is the end to be achieved and therefore of being unable to do anything about it. In 'The Symbolism of Poetry'[2] Yeats refers to Symons's 'The Symbolist Movement in Literature' and there Symons writes, in a passage which Yeats refers to,

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1 CP, p. 77; V, p. 169.

2 E&I, p. 153: 'Symbolism, as seen in writers of our day, would have no value if it were not seen also, under one disguise or another, in every great imaginative writer.'

that 'what distinguishes the Symbolism of our day from the Symbolism of the past is that it has now become conscious of itself.'[1] Self-consciousness, however, is not always beneficial: it denies one the possibility of doing the thing that others have done, because, unlike them, one does it with a definite sense of purpose and not just as part of some other project. If all poetry is symbolical that is a truth about poetry which is irrelevant to the construction of poems, since it is a part of their nature; once one realises that all poems are symbolical and attempts to create poems on that basis one changes the nature of 'poetry' as one had previously defined it. In Yeats's case, knowing that the end of poetry was a personal transcendence made it difficult for him to approach poetry with any sense of its relation to the individual life: the means towards transcendence become irrelevant, only the end worthwhile and therefore the effort suggested by the examples in 'The Secret Rose' is denied by him. The speaker waits, unwilling or unable to undertake any particular action because he does not know which will lead to the desired result. He therefore awaits an apocalypse which is total: instead of hoping for a time when the Rose will

Enfold me in my hour of hours;

he waits, and hopes that

Surely thine hour has come.

There is no pathway which the individual can take in order to see the ultimate perfection of the spirit: he can only hope to be present at the moment when revelation is made complete in apocalypse.

There is no pathway, that is, for the man: the significant factor

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1 Symons, Symbolist Movement in Literature, p. 5.

about all of the examples in 'The Secret Rose' is not only their activity, but the fact that the experiences to which they refer are all experiences we can only know about through art. Conchubar, Cuchulain, Caolte and Fergus only exist for us in the works of art in which they have been preserved: the work of art embodies action which the speaker himself cannot undertake. The pathway which the poems of this period begins to point towards is the pathway of a perfection constituted by art rather than celebrated in art or achieved through it. Art ceases to be a ladder towards transcendence or a window on to transcendence, but becomes the creator of transcendence. The idea of the symbol as the means by which one effects the transition from the temporal into the eternal is replaced by the idea of the symbol as itself the creation of the eternal out of the temporal. The symbol as a given image out of the anima mundi becomes the symbol as associative possibility within the Great Memory.

The transition between these two conceptions is revealed, I think, in the other Rose poem of 'The Wind Among the Reeds' - 'The Lover tells of the Rose in his Heart'.[1] The lover's desire that the world should be a place of fit perfection for his beloved turns Yeats's verse to a more realistic vein than in most of his early poetry:

> All things uncomely and broken, all things worn out and old,
> The cry of a child by the roadway, the creak of a lumbering cart,
> The heavy steps of the ploughman, splashing the wintry mould,
> Are wronging your image that blossoms a rose in the deeps of my heart.

In the context of this fallen world the rose can only occur in a form different from in previous poems; it no longer appears, like the everlasting voices of the poem that immediately precedes it in Collected Poems,

> in birds, in wind on the hill
> In shaken boughs, in tide on the shore

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1 CP, p. 62. V, p. 142.

but only in the relationship between the lover and the beloved. Instead of being something which appears actually in the world, even if only to the eyes which have prepared themselves for seeing it, the rose here appears only because of the relationship between the observer and what he observes. In the final line of the first stanza (quoted above) the 'rose' and the 'image' are totally identified by the fact that the verb semantically belongs to the former, but syntactically is attached to the latter. The rose can only blossom through the image; the image is not given directly in the world, but is a construction out of it by the speaker.[1]

> I hunger to build them anew and sit on a green knoll apart,
> With the earth and the sky and the water, re-made, like a casket of gold
> For my dreams of your image that blossoms a rose in the deeps of my heart.

The distance between the given and the constructed is made complete with the introduction of 'dreams': the image is not even the visual image presented to the mind by the outside world, it is the image as envisaged in dream, the pure essence and not the sense datum. The rose might previously - as in 'The Rose of Battle' - have depended upon human suffering in order to appear in the world, but here it is revealed only in an act of creation, however passive the man feels before that act.

The image, however, as an act of creation can, in the associationist context, only become powerful by its ability to generate multiple connections within the mind of its recipient. The image is purified by the

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1 The original poem was entitled 'Aedh Tells of the Rose in his Heart'; Yeats dropped the names in later revisions of many of these poems and they do seem redundant; they categorise the emotions by attributing them to a character when the emotions create their own character in any case. Aedh, however, is Gaelic for fire (see V, p. 803) and suggests the purification by the imagination of reality with which the poem is concerned.

relations which it establishes with previous images and experiences; it ceases to be a mere sense datum by being the focus for trains of association which are the real meaning of the given to the perceiving mind. The balance between this conception of the image and the conception of an eternal soul representing the eternal beauty on earth, which reveals itself to the observer, is superbly maintained in what is an apparently simple little poem, 'A Poet to his Beloved'.[1]

> I bring you with reverent hands
> The books of my numberless dreams,
> White woman that passion has worn
> As the tide wears the dove-grey sands,
> And with heart more old than the horn
> That is brimmed from the pale fire of time:
> White woman with numberless dreams,
> I bring you my passionate rhyme.

Poet and beloved each exist fully only in the context of an eternity which denies to them personally what they most represent: the woman is passion tired of itself and of its effort in the world, the man the purifying heart of 'The Lover Tells of the Rose in his Heart'. Each is capable of perfection, the one of self, the other of art, only because each stands with an eternity behind him or her which at once gives significance to their present existence and denies them the possibility of fulfilment in that existence. Like the image in the associationist context, their excellence depends on the 'numberless dreams' which emanate from the present moment, passing into their past existence. The only thing that can be 'passionate' in their relation is the rhyme which passes between them, and as is implied by that word, which links them together as two of the same kind. By its parallel patterning the poem suggests the dependence of each upon the other: the rhymes which embody the passion

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1 CP, p. 70. V, p. 157.

neither of them is allowed are possible only because, like the rose in the previous poem, of the relationship between them though it is a relationship of fitting but unresolvable elements. She is passion ever changing through all time; he all time contained in each moment; she is the constancy of all the great human emotions, he is the multiplicity of associations from the past.

The failures of Yeats's personal life, the long drawn love for Maud Gonne, the relationship with Olivia Shakespear, seem in these poems to have thrust him out of the possible perfection offered by the linking of symbol and religion. Where the soul yearns for the unattainable in time it can hardly contemplate perfection of the universe: the mystical union of ontological realms is denied by the much more urgent failure of sexual union:

> I wander by the edge
> Of this desolate lake
> Where wind cries in the sedge:
> Until the axle break
> That keeps the stars in their round,
> And hurls in the deep
> The banners of East and West
> And the girdle of light is unbound,
> Your head will not lie on the breast
> Of your beloved in sleep.[1]

Sublimated apocalypse will not satisfy a life lived in time which has to bear the burden of its sorrow from day to day. Apocalypse is as distiant a solution as the desired consummation of the personal relation. If Maud had any part in the Rose, then the Rose will keep its secret forever - the mage has lost his power over the gates of the universe. Knowledge of an occult kind cannot resolve the divisions of the universe, does not provide power to its possessor. The only power left is the power of the poet himself.

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1 'He hears the cry of the sedge', CP, p. 75. V, p. 165.

It is the power of the poet we become aware of in many of the later poems - later in Yeats's ordering of them, though often later in time too - of 'The Wind Among the Reeds'. The constitutive locution, by which the poet constructs his lover into the image he wishes of her, becomes increasingly frequent:

> Fasten your hair with a golden pin,
> And bind up every wandering tress.[1]
>
> Crumple the rose in your hair;
> And cover your lips with odorous twilight and say:[2]
>
> Half close your eyelids, loosen your hair[3]

Such locutions reveal the desire for stasis which Yeats wishes to impose upon the changing nature of the world and which can, verbally, be imposed in the poem, but which can only be hoped for in life by an ultimate apocalypse or in death. The locutions are the verbal equivalent of poems such as 'He wishes his beloved were dead':

> Nor would you rise and hasten away,
> Though you have the will of the wild birds,
> But know your hair was bound and wound
> About the stars and moon and sun:
> O would, beloved, that you lay
> Under the dock-leaves in the ground,
> While lights were paling one by one.[4]

The stasis required is now a stasis _in_ time and not a resolution of time. Yet it is a stasis in time achieved by allowing the lover to remember the past as a perfect construction of his own, to relive the past as transformed into the lineaments of his own desire:

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1 'He gives his beloved certain rhymes', CP, p. 71. V, p. 157.

2 'The lover asks forgiveness because of his many moods', CP, p. 73; V, p. 162.

3 'He thinks of those who have spoken evil of his beloved', CP, p. 75; V, p. 166.

4 'He wishes his beloved were dead', CP, p. 80; V, p. 175.

> You would come hither, and bend your head
> And I would lay my head on your breast;
> And you would murmur tender words,
> Forgiving me, because you were dead.[1]

Stasis is not escape from time, but the recovery of lost time.

In the context of the previous discussions of the associationist aesthetic the relevance of this will be evident: Yeats's attitude in a poem such as this is mimetic of the theoretical working of the poem in the associationist scheme. Of course, Yeats is not here writing an associationist poem in terms of its form; he was always too concerned with the manipulation of ideas to commit himself to such a possibility fully, but several poems of the volume do use associationism as the basis of their construction. 'He remembers forgotten beauty' once again reveals the balance that the poems of 'The Wind Among the Reeds' strike between two phases of Yeats's development. Its initial contention is entirely associationist:

> When my arms wrap you round I press
> My heart upon the loveliness
> That has long faded from the world;
> The jewelled crowns that kings have hurled
> In shadowy pools, when armies fled:
> The love-tales wrought with silken thread
> By dreaming ladies upon cloth
> That has made fat the murderous moth;[2]

The given leads into a recollection of all that is associated with it by resemblance and which, by being remembered, is retained as a part of the present. The images themselves are of life transformed by ritual or art into a perfection which, it would seem, the world cannot bear and so must destroy: the crown is lost when the armies fled; the tapestry is eaten

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1 Ibid.

2 CP, p. 69. V, p. 155.

by moths, and even the incense of a later image, suggesting a religious mysticism, forces the participants to retreat from their perception of beauty:

> The dew-cold lilies ladies bore
> Through many a sacred corridor
> Where such grey clouds of incense rose
> That only God's eyes did not close.

What has been lost, however, by the movement of time in one direction, is recovered by the movement of the mind in the other. Is Yeats seeing these images in the beloved[1] and so transforming her by his own perception? Later poems would have it so, but the associationist pattern modulates into an ontological one in the course of this poem:

> For that pale breast and lingering hand
> Come from a more dream-heavy land,
> A more dream heavy hour than this.

The woman again becomes the personification of a transcendental beauty which exists in some higher realm: 'And when you sigh from kiss to kiss / I hear white Beauty sighing, too,' and that transformation allows the poem to enter into the higher ontological realm of pure essences where there remains nothing

> But flame on flame, deep under deep,
> Throne over throne, where in half sleep,
> Their swords upon their iron knees,
> Brood her high lonely mysteries.

These marvellously enigmatic figures do not brood on Beauty's mysteries, they are those mysteries in their brooding; they are the universe's true constituents, the eternity to which all else is mere appearance. Those

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1 Bernard Levine, The Dissolving Image: the spiritual-esthetic development of W.B. Yeats (Detroit: Wayne State Univ. Press, 1970) p. 53 argues that this poem deals with Yeats's relations with Olivia Shakespear: it seems unlikely that both this and 'The lover mourns for the loss' (CP 68) can be directed towards the same person. Only Maud offered Yeats the image of an eternal beauty.

swords lie waiting for the moment when the world will be resolved by being destroyed in favour of the eternal: the implicit violence, as compared with the implications of the Rose, cannot be ignored.[1] Having moved on to this higher plane, however, the poem does formally achieve an associationist structure: these figures remain with us, an image with no resolution given and their 'high lonely mysteries' are the lonely mysteries of our minds as we await their significance, like their apocalypse, passively. What they mean to us can be suggested (as I have tried to do above), but it is their suggestiveness which is their true meaning. Having reached these figures only by following the paths of the speaker's own associations, revealed to us in the course of the poem, the poem leaves them with us to create the implicit balancing structure out of our own associations. If successful we too will become aware of that aspect of our lives which is the secret embodiment of the forgotten beauty of the past - but we can only be successful if we are also lucky, both in our relations and in the contents of our mind.

The mythic figures with which 'He remembers forgotten beauty' ends are closely related to Yeats's conception of 'The Moods'[2] I have already quoted a passage from this little essay, suggesting the ontology of moods which lies behind the phenomenal universe. The final sentence of the essay bears repetition, however: 'the only restraint he can obey is the mysterious instinct that has made him an artist, and that teaches him to discover immortal moods in mortal desires, an undecaying hope in our trivial ambitions, a divine love in sexual passion.' The direction of this

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1 Compare Levine, The Dissolving Image, p. 57 where this image is seen as 'a softening of the apocalyptic vision'.

2 E&I, p. 195.

statement seems to be towards the eternal: the poet discovers what is, in fact, there, though one might often not notice it. But the aspect of 'The Moods' which Yeats came to stress was the ontological reality which can only exist through the temporal world. The poem is much more clear on this count than the essay:

> Time drops in decay,
> Like a candle burnt out,
> And the mountains and woods
> Have their day, have their day;
> What one in the rout
> Of the fire-born moods,
> Has fallen away?

At first sight this may seem only to state the ontological priority of the moods, but the whole direction of the poem is the reverse from the direction of the essay, which is why Yeats was able to quote it in Per Amica Silentia Lunae twenty years later.[1] The fact that the rhetorical question about the moods develops out of the image of time's decay suggests that one is causally dependent on the other. The moods which exist eternally only exist because they have come into being in the processes of time, rather than revealing themselves as eternal through time. It is the fire which is burning down the candle, and is the product of the candle, that gives rise to these eternal essences, but the fire is also the purifying force of the imagination; thus only through the activity of the imagination, working on the processes of time, is eternity created for our contemplation. Where the Rose had offered a static node of perfection uniting eternal with temporal, but could only be presented in poetry by a movement into narrative, the narrative of 'He remembers forgotten beauty' moves towards the achievement of an image which will be the embodiment of a static perfection. It has, however, only been reached through the activity of the mind, and particularly of memory, preventing the loss of what might have

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1 Per Amica Silentia Lunae, sect. x; E, p. 525.

seemed forgotten, and it offers itself, in the conclusion of the poem, to the activity of the reader's mind. Thus where earlier poems had struggled to see eternity mirrored in temporality, the mirroring is here carried in the relationship between the structure of the poem and the reader's response to it. The integration achieved is between the poet's past and the reader's past, through their mutual recognition of the significance of a central symbol, one that the poet achieves by following an associative process and that the reader understands by following his own. The poem is, therefore, two entirely different things and we must be careful to distinguish them. On the one hand, the poem is the whole activity performed on the page and in reading it we attempt to understand the communication of someone else's experience; on the other hand, the essence of the poem as the speaker's experience is the vision which it makes possible for him - the rest is prologue to that vision - and the real poem for us is that vision with the associated images it creates in our minds. The poet's associations are not a real part of <u>our</u> poem because they are not our memories (though they are essential to our experience of our poem); our poem, our own associative experiences which follow on from the final image, is not a part of Yeats's poem, but is what Yeats's poem is attempting to achieve.

It was, of course, images of this kind that Frank Kermode explored in Romantic Image,[1] and he has come by far the closest to understanding them: I can do no better than quote this paragraph to which my own thoughts are, as it were, a footnote:

It is the object of the artist's long labouring thought,

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1 Frank Kermode, <u>Romantic Image</u> (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1961) p. 56.

> first memorably celebrated by Yeats in 'Adam's Curse', to produce what is passionate and rhythmical, but uncommitted, belonging to the body and not to the abstract intellect: having, in fact - and this is the link between the analogy of the female body and its development, the analogy of the dancer, and the organicist analogy - a life of its own. Such a work is independent of the author's intellectual intention; if he comments upon it he is in danger of incurring the odium of the Blakean 'spectre'. What he has to say about it is of no special relevance ... Nor has it any one explicable meaning; passion and particular meanings are brought to it. It is a cue for passion, like those statues of the late poem, where girls and boys plant "live lips upon a plummet measured face". Beauty is the perfectly proportioned body; proportion comes first, passion afterwards. Explication and paraphrase will always fall hopelessly short, simply because they are ways of talking about something other than art, agents of intellect and not of imagination. What matters is the concrete, unique, symbolic object, the living unified body. Et tout le reste est littérature.

This is a superbly challenging conception of Yeats's poetry, one that has scarcely been bettered, but what it fails to achieve, I think, is the leap from content to form. The dancer represents the nature of the poetry, but the poetry includes the dancer. We have to see that Yeats's poems at their best present us with a new conception of the poem's ontological status: the poem is only the means towards an experience, not the central experience itself. The dancer is the image of this kind of poetry, but she is not the experience of the poetry: the poetry is what we experience in ourselves as a result of the presentation of the independent image. It is given a life not because of some organic nature, but because it takes our life into it as we read it. Kermode quotes a letter from Yeats to Sturge Moore, from 1929, which reveals the nature of the poem as means: 'It does not define ideal conditions, nor should it do so, and so it remains the starting point for meditation.'[1] It is only when we have

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1 Kermode, Romantic Image, p. 56; W.B. Yeats and T. Sturge Moore: Correspondance ed. Ursula Bridge, (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1953), p. 144.

got past the idea that the poem as a linguistic structure given to us on the page is the end of poetic art, and realise it as an act directed towards an altogether separate end, that we can begin to understand fully not only the intention of Yeats's art - for after all he might have been wrong about the nature of his own poems - but the structure which informs them and within which their meanings are developed.

The images towards which Yeats's poetry strives are thus dynamic not because they are, in some sense, themselves alive - though this is not altogether untrue, the image having a separate existence in the Great Memory - but because they generate a dynamic movement of associations in the reader, a movement which is the correlative of the fixity of the image that they constantly return to. The dual nature of the image is revealed wittily, in the context of the relationship between poet and beloved, in 'The Lover asks forgiveness because of his many moods.'[1] This is one of Yeats's most ambitious attempts in 'The Wind Among the Reeds' to make the poem and the period coincide. The poem opens with a conditional statement which leads into a constitutive imperative:

> If this importunate heart trouble your peace
> With words lighter than air,
> Or hopes that in mere hoping flicker and cease;
> Crumple the rose in your hair;
> And cover your lips with odorous twilight and say,
> 'O Hearts of wind-blown flame.'

The significance of the 'words lighter than air' is not only established by the fact that this poem in Collected Poems follows rapidly on 'A poet to his beloved' and 'He gives his beloved certain rhymes', but by the fact that what follows in the beloved's speech is a description of the associational activity that brings the past into the present. This speech, which is part

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1 CP, p. 73; V, p. 162.

of the way in which the poet constitutes the beloved into an image, is in effect a listing, put into her mouth, of all the memories which her beauty provokes in him:

> O winds, older than the changing of night and day,
> That murmuring and longing came
> From marble cities loud with tabors of old
> In dove-grey faery lands;
> From battle banners, fold upon purple fold,
> Queens wrought with glimmering hands;
> That saw young Niamh hover with love-lorn face
> Above the wandering tide;
> And lingered in the hidden desolate place
> Where the last Phoenix died,
> And wrapped the flames above his holy head;
> And still murmur and long:

The winds are the winds of the past which his mind draws into the orbit of her beauty. The actual elements of it hardly matter; each image is there to provoke what each is an instance of, the associational patterns of memory. This speech offers pity from the beloved for the restlessness of the process which is always attempting to fix itself upon some static image of perfection, but the irony that the poem constructs is, of course, that she is herself provoking such a process.

> And cover the pale blossoms of your breast
> With your dim heavy hair,
> And trouble with a sigh for all things longing for rest
> The odorous twilight there.

The penultimate line reads as though it were two statements syntactically collapsed into one another, as though the sigh is not only <u>for</u> everything longing for rest, but also troubles them by its sighing. The irony of the poem is, however, compounded by the fact that the poem has constituted the beloved's languorous speech and perfection of gesture. She attributes changeability to him when, in fact, it is his 'moods' that are a part of the eternal and when it is she who instigates change in them; he attributes a relationship with the eternal to her which he, in fact, is creating in the course of the speech he attributes to her. The peace she desires is made

impossible by her beauty; the beauty he desires can never be fixed because it exists only through the flux of the associations it produces in him. The relationship between the two is a mimesis of the relationship between reader and poem when the poem works, through the associational processes of the poet's own mind, towards an image which will exist in time and yet have the stasis of eternity. The significance of that image can only be known from its relationship with the past; it transcends time not by denying it but by incorporating it.

A poem which Yeats placed as the penultimate one of 'The Rose' in Collected Poems, immediately before his address to his fellow countrymen in 'To Ireland in the Coming Times', but which originally appeared as the dedication of Poems (1895), reveals fully the process of associative imagery. 'To some I have talked with by the fire',[1] opens with a dismissal of the present activity of poetic creation for a more significant time in the past:

> While I wrought out these fitful Danaan rhymes,
> My heart would brim with dreams about the times
> When we bent down above the fading coals;

'Dreams' in this context has suffered a shift of meaning from its use in other Yeats poems of this period, such as 'The Man who Dreamed of Faeryland', for it is dream not as a condition of consciousness separated from the normal patterns of experience, but essentially as reconstructed memory. It is not the passing into another realm of existence, but a recollection of the past. The particular past which is recalled is, however, conversation about the supernatural, about the ontologically other:

> And talked of the dark folk, who live in souls
> Of passionate men, like bats in the dead trees;
> And of wayward twilight companies,

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1 CP, p. 56; V, p. 136.

Who sigh with mingled sorrow and content,
Because their blossoming dreams have never bent
Under the fruit of evil and of good;

The conversational topic which the poet recalls encompasses the divided nature of the universe and the contradictions contained by each of its realms, but that is only a prelude to a vision of what unites them:

And of the embattled flaming multitude
Who rise, wing above wing, flame above flame,
And, like a storm, cry the Ineffable Name,
And with the clashing of their sword-blades make
A rapturous music, till the morning break
And the white hush end all but the loud beat
Of their long wings, the flash of their white feet.

Syntactically, this vision is predicated on 'And talked of' in line four of the poem, it is a part of their conversation, but by the time we reach this part of the poem we have left both the dreaming poet and the conversation he remembers far behind. The vision separates itself from what precedes it to stand by itself as the poem's own affirmation - a product of the link between past and present, not one of the elements of either. When Yeats writes that the 'rapturous music' lasts 'till the morning break' we might read that as the closing of the circle, the conversation by the dying fire completes itself and rises to its most intense pitch only as morning breaks, but we have by this time moved on to a different level. The morning of the third last line is not following upon the night of the conversation: through the memory of the conversation the poem has translated us into the universe of essences and apocalypse. The mind's recovery of a significant moment of the past leads to an image of that which transcends the temporal dimension which made it possible. And the poem enacts this by leaving us with an image whose significance passes beyond the associations which generated it and will only be comprehended by us if we allow the same freedom in our own consciousness. After the poem's music is ceased

it passes on into the inner silence of the reader's mind, discovering there its own possibilities, 'the loud beat / Of their long wings, the flash of their white feet.' The poem is an imitation not only of the process of creation, but of the process of reading the kind of creation it is. The apocalypse which it asserts is a dream within a dream, a conversation within a memory, that moves away from any present reality; yet the process of the poem itself leads us towards that apocalyptic image as a growing reality. What is the past for the dreaming mind of the poet is the future for the reader as he works his way through the poem, and the understanding of that intensely real image can only be achieved by a parallel movement into the reader's own past, a meditation which will set free the associative possibilities of the image to discover its own inner significance. The image wraps up time not by denying it, but by formally invoking multiple pasts as participants in its own existence. Its significance is not its content but its effect, which is the discovery of a point at which our individual memories, our contingent pasts are united, and we escape from the accident of what we are by charting the associations generated by what we have been. The symbol is no longer a magical power invoked into the poem as a path towards transcendence; the symbol achieves its status through what is evoked by the poem as it constructs transcendence.